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BERNA BOYLE.

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A Love Story of the County Down.

BY

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PALACE GARDENS," ETC.



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A Love Story of the County Down.

CHAPTER I.

REVERSE the glass of the nineteenth century, let the sands of time sift swiftly backwards for nearly thirty-four years, and I will show you a tiny village nestling among the green slopes of Down.

But the merest hamlet! Spite of the railway station less than a mile distant; the post-office and public-house combined, situated just where the Comber Road branches off from the Newtonards; the smithy hard by; the church, perched aloft on one of those quaint low hills that have won for the county a not inapt comparison to a basket of eggs; the police barracks, the remarkable-looking Rectory, the mail-car running along the highway twice a day, the Presbyterian meeting-house—surely, the smallest and most unpretending of picturesque villages!

Only one side to it, and that extremely imperfect! First a row of one-storied cottages, where dwelt the local cobbler and tailor, both deadly jealous of town ways and town notions. Then fields advanced boldly to the front, succeeded, after a short space, by the police barracks, a couple of its occupants, privates in the Irish constabulary, being generally encountered lounging on the footpath opposite. A little further, a few more cottages were scattered beside the road; at the extreme

end of the village, beyond the lane which still winds up to the gate of the graveyard, stood proudly forth the shop, where nothing could be bought, it might have been supposed, that any human creature would desire to purchase. Close to the turning leading to the Rectory was a second smithy, for the neighbourhood was (and is) one much given to farming, and found constant need of a farrier's services ; a few detached houses, farm and otherwise, lay back from the left-hand side of the road—the right being skirted, as stated, by humble cottages ; the whole place looked green and white by reason of the green fields and the white-washed houses. Up on the hillsides lay great masses of trees and belts of plantation, and higher still you could see roads winding over the heights whence lovely views were to be obtained of Belfast Lough, and the Antrim mountains, of Scrabo close at hand, and, on a clear day, a glimpse of Scotland—as the crow flies, little more than twenty miles distant from that extreme point of the county Down, close to which the English steamers plough their way, while, keeping between the Copelands and Donaghadee, they shape an almost direct course southward down the Channel.

It was a summer's morning in the July of 1850 ; the barley and the flax both needed sun ; the potatoes, anxiously watched for signs of that fatal blight, could have borne any amount of heat and been the better for it. The grass had grown well and was more than ready for the scythe, and the rain was coming down in torrents. It was a morning to make sad the heart of any farmer. All through the district, from the Rectory to the hovel, there was "mourning and lamentation and woe : " the labourers could not work ; the horses were standing idle in the stable, eating their heads off. Masters and men, for once of one mind, looked mournfully out at the weather. Steadily the rain held on—dripping through the leaves, plashing into the pools, swelling the streams, soaking the earth. In the whole of that village there were no creatures happy but the ducks, which waddled about quacking, literally embarrassed by the wealth in the way of dirt Providence was providing for them.

About a mile out of the village, in the Craigantlet direction, which is the nearest route to Bangor—not on the crest of the rising ground, that opens to any one who has patiently toiled up the long incline such an unexpected and magnificent stretch of sea, and mountain, and headland, and smiling, restful land ; but admirably placed on the slope of the hill, so as to be protected from the north-east wind—stood a house of some pretension. It was enbowered in trees. It was approached by an avenue upon which the foot fell almost as noiselessly as on the turf of the lawn. There was a great silence about the place. When you entered the gate the world seemed left behind. It was an old mansion—once the Dower House of a noble family—but it had descended in the social scale, till it simply “went with the land”—was thrown in as a mere makeweight with the farm. Scarcely charged for in the rent—the tenant was continually grumbling concerning the expense entailed upon him by the “tumbledown old barrack”—where ladies in stomachers and farthingales, and patches and high-heeled shoes, and powdered hair, once rustled through the wainscoted rooms ; and handsome gallants came wooing, and dark deeds, it was said, were done—notably one which caused the imprint of a blood-stained hand on the wall, and the drip of blood on the black oak staircase ; and the legend that now and then the ghost of a murdered woman might be seen by some human being more especially favoured than his fellows.

Through the years the house had been persistently falling from its once high estate. As the family to whom it belonged grew greater it grew less. Time went on, and the mansion, as the winters and summers came and went, got more and more dilapidated ; each successive tenant refused it even one poor coat of paint ; each occupier left it in worse plight than his predecessor. The ladies of the great family had long ceased to inhabit a nook so utterly out of the world. In London, or Bath, or Paris, or any other favourite resort, they spent the few pounds the Dower House brought them by way of rental. The memory of man could not extend to the time when a

Dame Bountiful, residing under the shadow of those ancient trees, blessed the neighbourhood with her gracious presence.

The former days were gone, and the prestige of the old Dower House with them. It had sunk surely, if slowly. First it was let to a Newtonards man, who, having gone out to India without a penny, came back, to quote the country-side gossip, possessed of "millions and millions."

Unfortunately, he brought back in addition a native wife and half a dozen dark-skinned black-eyed children, all of whom, being regarded as intruders, and treated as such, the "rajah"—so his neighbours generally called him—sold off his furniture, packed up his belongings, and took boat for England. Then a sporting character, in great request at mess and bachelor dinners, who, it was credibly asserted, fought mains of cocks in the dining-room and had boxing matches in the great barn, remained in Ardilaw for the space of two years, at the expiration of which term he drank himself to death, greatly to the satisfaction of many worthy people. After that the place was let for the summer to persons able to drive across to Holywood "for the bathing." Then it went down another step, and was rented by a Belfast shopkeeper, who wanted country air for his children, and grass where those children could tumble about and grow up wild.

When it had been knocked almost out of human recognition by the young fry, their papa died; his business collapsed, and Ardilaw was again in the market. This time a gentleman farmer thought he would essay a wrestle with the poor hill-side land, and a contest with ignorance and the elements; but five successive bad seasons, to say nothing of relays of incompetent labourers and dishonest bailiffs, compelled his departure.

For a year and four months the house stood empty. Weeds grew rank in the orchard and kitchen garden, roses bloomed and faded in the parterres once tended by My Lady, moss covered the drive, the leaves lay where they had fallen on the lawn, from the windows no men's or women's eyes looked

out upon a landscape destitute of the attraction of human life and human movement. Some few persons came to view, but no one remained to rent. Then suddenly the whole village was astounded, and possibly shocked, to hear Hewson Muir, of Kilmoon Farm, had rented the Dower House—stock, lock, and barrel; land, water, wood, and bog—as tenant-at-will, under the great family, who “ought to have known better” than let the “old place to a man little more nor a labourer.” Presumably the great family, like lesser families, understood its own business at least as well as its critics. It was a family which had its personal interests at heart, and always found a way, spite of settlements and entails, of getting rid of unremunerative and troublesome property. To cut a long story short, before Mr. Muir had been a year in possession, Ardilaw changed hands, and passed into the keeping of a certain Lyle Garnsey, commonly reported to be the “wickedest man in the county.”

The sinister reputation of that gentleman who fought cocks in his dining-room, and hob-nobbed with the Heenan of his day, paled when contrasted against the scorching sins of Lyle Garnsey. In Mr. Garnsey’s case distance lent enchantment to the view: what were a few cocks mangled and bleeding near Belfast in comparison with crimes committed in Dublin and London and “furrin parts”?

Over many a turf fire the misdoings of “the Squire” were spoken of with bated breath, the future of his only child, a daughter, discussed, and his own eventual destination more than hinted at.

Between this new landlord and Mr. Muir the most friendly relations were soon established; though the former was almost an infidel and the latter a red-hot Orangeman, though one was a Liberal and the other a Tory, Mr. Muir sternly maintained “ye might chance to meet worse nor Lyle Garnsey,” while Mr. Garnsey was wont to declare he considered “Mr. Muir a most excellent person.” Twice a year, when he went to pay his rent, Mr. Muir dined at Beechfield, and it was a sight to behold

him gravely accepting viands he did not like, served in a fashion to which he was not accustomed, from the hands of a footman who had much ado to conceal the disgust he felt at having to wait "upon such a fellow."

The years went by, and Mr. Muir, at all events, made money out of Ardilaw. If nobody else had ever managed to extract a profit from the land, Mr. Muir did. He rarely worked himself, but he was without peer in the matter of seeing that other people "wrought" as they should. Sometimes he might have been seen guiding the plough, dressed in decent black, his coat a swallow-tail, and his shirt white as snow; but, as a rule, he preferred watching the turning up of the clods, and following while some one else harrowed and cast seed into the ground.

He was tall, over six feet in height—"six feet two in my stocking soles," he often stated—of spare habit, long-limbed, loosely made, with no depth in his shoulders and no width across his chest; a man who looked as if he had been thrown together instead of built; a person no human being could have called handsome.

On that wet July morning he stood beside one of the windows in the old wainscoted dining-room, splicing the handle of a gig whip and looking out at the weather. It was indeed, as has been said, a day to try the faith of any farmer. Ordinarily, Mr. Muir—as became a man who hated the Pope, and loved "Protestant Boys," Orange Lilies, and the rousing cry of "No Surrender!"—had sufficient faith in the wisdom and justice of his Maker; but as he watched the rain coming down faster and faster, the avenue getting wetter and wetter, the heavens growing darker and darker, he felt there must be something utterly wrong somewhere. Could it possibly have happened (trying circumstances will give rise to doubt even in minds not ordinarily prone to scepticism) that Providence, finding the whole scheme of creation too vast for individual attention, had given Ireland, as regarded its weather, over to a sort of Viceregent, who was making as great a mess of physical matters as Lord Lieutenants usually do of political?

This was a view of the question which in the then state of the hay crop seemed to Mr. Muir so extremely probable, he felt he should have liked to "threep" it out with "some sensible person;" but as there chanced to be no human being in the room except his eldest daughter "Bell," the farmer, though big with thought, decided he had best hold his tongue, "women folk being as a rule fools to talk to."

Miss Bell Muir was a lady who might have been guessed at any age, according to the fancy of the spectator. Really but six-and-twenty, she had that hard and battered appearance it is competent for even quite young women to assume who have always cultivated the *utile* to the exclusion of the *dulce*. There was not much *dulce* about Miss Muir. She never could be considered happy except when half-killing herself, and harassing everybody about her, with a perfect plague of labour. Like her father, she loved to see other persons hard at work; unlike her father, nothing pleased her better than to work harder than them all. About the house she was a "besom of destruction." She thought it the height of bliss to spend hours in a hurricane of sweeping, scouring, bustling, grumbling, scolding. On those evil occasions the cats were harried from the hearth; the dogs, if they put their noses inside the kitchen door, were received with the contents of a pail of water; chanticleer, leading his wives across the threshold with great cur-a-rooing and much uplifting of his feet like a high-stepping horse, had to retrace his way at a different pace and in a different fashion; while Mr. Muir himself was constantly asked "if he couldn't come into the house some different road nor across the wet flags."

Not a labourer on the farm but knew and detested Saturday—till the evening, that is to say—when Bell, refreshed and satisfied with the results of her campaign against the powers of dirt, either took to baking griddle-bread, which scented the whole neighbourhood with a sweet wholesome smell; or else, when one of her sisters offered to make "fadge," or wheaten or oaten cake, sat down to knit coarse stockings in a leisure so thoroughly earned.

On that particular wet morning in July, Miss Muir, occasionally looking at her father askance, the while a certain bright and brisk number seven needle glanced in and out of some fine white "shirting," was adorned in the fullest war-paint she had ever assumed when merely arming herself for domestic conflict.

It consisted of a clean and stiffly-starched print dress—colour, lilac; tone, dark; pattern, hideous; a calico apron, white as soft water and grass-bleaching could make and keep it; a small woollen shawl, checked black and red, pinned securely across her bosom; and a linen cap, with two goffered borders made of the same uncompromising material, tied under her chin by a pair of linen strings about two inches wide, drawn into a cravat bow, framing her face till she looked like some sunburnt old baby.

This was Bell—the eldest female hope of Mr. Muir's three matrimonial essays—this was Bell, secretly dreaded even by her stern papa, who had not "much opinion of any of the sex"—meaning the softer portion of creation—this was Bell, so famous through all the country-side for her powers of work and management, that many a man had cast sheep's eyes upon her, and would have proposed long enough before, but for the knowledge that Miss Muir had a high opinion of her value in the matrimonial market, and for a doubt as to the amount with which Mr. Muir meant to endow her.

"Carry's first steed in his stable," said many a canny father and mother, when discussing matters over with sons anxious to better their position; "Carry and Robert 'll have the pick off Ardilaw. For all she's been to him, for all she's done for him, the old man hasn't the heart for Bell Muir he ought, considering there's not such a hand for butter in the county as hers."

It was the butter question Miss Muir was considering, while she sat "working on" a new shirt of her father's. Nevertheless, magnanimously ignoring her own anxieties, she essayed to converse with her parent as he stood beside the

window commanding a comprehensive view of the village, the lawn, the trees, the drive, and the rain.

"Have you had any further word from Sam Dopp about the cottage?" she asked, her voice sounding much older and harsher than the voice of so young a woman had any right to sound.

"Ay—his brother came over yesterday between the lights, and said Sam would agree to rising the pound there was between us if I would put him up a pigstye; but I told him I would do no such thing; that if Sam wanted to keep pigs he must do it some place else than at my cottage."

"Why, what ails you at the pigs, poor things? What would the Dopps do with all the leavings from so big a family without a pig to eat them up?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," answered Mr. Muir defiantly. "I'll neither have pigs rooting up the garden nor children destroying the clean papers and the fresh paint in the house. Mr. Orr made a sort of small paradise of the place, and if I can't get somebody that will keep it as it ought to be kept, why, it shall stay empty, that's all."

Miss Muir put in a few energetic stitches before she observed,

"You set great store by the cottage."

"And what would hinder me to set great store by it? Where could you find its like—a picture inside and out? I just stood and looked at it the other day, and thought the man did right well to call it Clear Stream. The birds were singing, and the flowers were all abloom, and the air was scented with them, and the bit of grass was green as a fairy ring, and smooth and soft like the velvet in Miss Garnsey's mantilla, and the stream was running away under the plank bridge as hard as it could go, laughing back at the sun and making merry as it went; and the myrtle-tree was a sheet of blossom—it looked for all the world as if there had been a heavy snowstorm; and tufts of it were hanging so thick as to hide the polished green leaves—the very ground below the tree was white. I made

up my mind at that minute Dopp and his swarm of children should never spoil what Mr. Orr spent such a lot of time and thought over."

"What are you going to do, then? Let it stop idle till the wet is running down the walls, and the garden is a wilderness, and you might stand up to your middle in the grass?"

Mr. Muir winced a little; he knew such things had happened before, and he saw no great cause to doubt such things might happen again; but still he replied with dogged determination,

"I have not wholly decided; only Dopp's not going to be any tenant of mine, and I told John as much."

"Sam will be finely pleased when he hears the notion you have taken."

"I don't care whether he's pleased or displeased; and there's no reason that I'm aware of why I shouldn't have my way as well as another."

"You're right there; there is no reason at all."

"Still, there is no call why the house should stand empty, if that can be helped; so I've put an advertisement in the *News Letter* that Clear Stream Cottage, Dundonald, is to be rented by the year."

"The whole of Belfast will be running after it," commented Miss Muir, with a fine sneer.

"It may, but I hope it won't be on a day like this;" and, having got a confession off his mind which had been weighing upon it, Mr. Muir resumed his occupation; while Miss Muir, proceeding with her sewing, considered how she could "pay her father off for not letting the cottage to that decent man Sam Dopp."

"It's 'teeming' still," she began, seizing the opportunity threading her needle afforded for changing her attitude and "looking fair" at the author of her being.

"An' the Lord alone knows when it intends to leave off," said Mr. Muir, so entirely suspending the business of splicing that the released length of string immediately uncoiled itself.

"But what the deuce can ye expect when it rains on Sant Swethen's Day — Devil take him, whoever he was! He couldn't have been much of a Sant, in my opinion, or he'd have given a thought to honest folk trying to make an honest living between — and the north-east wind, as somebody says."

"You don't believe in all that old story, I'm very sure, father," observed Miss Muir, who, like her surviving parent, had her own special form of scepticism.

"What would hinder me believing it? My father and my grandfather, and, I'm very sure, my great-grandfather before that, believed in St. Swethen's Day; and I never was one to fly in the face of my elders. Why wouldn't I—"

"It's just a legend got up by the Romans for their own ends," persisted the lady.

"Have your way in the matter, as I'm very sure you will," said Mr. Muir; "but ye can't deny it mostly does rain on the fifteenth of July, Old Style—"

"Ay, and it rains many an odd time besides," retorted Bell.

"Well, it's an ill wind blows nobody good. If it hadn't been for the wet, you and Carline and Sall would have had to do the churning among ye this morning."

"Me and Sall you mean; it's little help, but disturbance, we'd have got from Carline."

"What's the young officer doing with himself now he can't limp out to the lawn or down to the river?" asked Mr. Muir, discreetly changing the subject.

"He's just painting the beech-tree from the passage window; Carline carried him out a table, and set his things ready after breakfast; and as for limping, he can put his foot to the ground as well as either of us when he likes. I saw him yesterday going up the stairs three at a time, but he didn't know I was near. If he had, it's holding on by the baluster he'd have been, and groaning with the pain."

Having completed which vivid outline, a vast deal more

true to nature than any Ensign Ludham ever sketched, Miss Muir proceeded with her work, and left her father to fill in such details as pleased, or did not please, him at his leisure.

"It's just awful to look at yon rain," observed the farmer, when he had quite finished splicing the whip, and stood, idly twisting the lash round the handle, looking out at the steady downpour which bade fair ere long to swell the rivers, and bring a second curse of water over the land.

"It is that," agreed Miss Muir. "What a pity you would mow that grass in the long meadow! it'll every bit rot on the ground; I doubt if it'll even come in for litter."

"Ye've a pleasant way of putting things, my woman."

"Well, what I say's true. You wouldn't have me tell you a lie, would you?"

"I'm not just so sure it's always agreeable to hear the truth."

"We're not of the same way of thinking, then," observed Miss Muir, in a spirit of the sternest virtue.

"I don't know that, either, Bell. For instance, if one said you were a very ordinary sort of woman to look at, it wouldn't be a lie; but I doubt if you'd be best pleased, after all."

"I never did set up to be anything beyond the common," returned Miss Muir, with a sublime composure, though her father's remark cut her to the quick.

"Maybe it was just as well," retorted her father.

On hearing which remark, Miss Muir—Christian name Isabella—rose with great dignity, and, observing, "As you are in the mind to pay me such fine compliments, I think I'll go and print the butter; my hands are cool now," left the room.

"Your hands may be cool," soliloquised Mr. Muir, "but your temper isn't." An idea apparently so comforting that though, looking at the sodden earth, he again anathematised the good St. Swithin, it was not with half the fervour which distinguished his previous utterances.

CHAPTER II.

A DELUGE of summer rain was sweeping the Belfast streets clean. Dawn had appeared, clad in delicate gray wrappings of sad misty cloud, and it is only fair to say the fulfilment of day did not belie the promise of morn. The sun remained resolutely out of sight, the heavens were leaden, the earth was sodden; Devis, the Cave Hill, and the Black Mountain had not merely "put their nightcaps on," but retired altogether from view.

A good stream, swift as a mountain torrent, was running down each filthy gutter. On Lettuce and Carrick Hills rosy, curly-headed, barefooted children were in the turbid water which rushed to flush the sewers, disporting themselves like ducklings. Upon the Crumlin Road, past the Court-house, where Justice—her eyes bandaged with a stone fillet—sits high aloft, holding her scales, utterly crooked, car-drivers, with shout and whip, urged fast horses recklessly; Hercules Street, then lined with butchers' shops, was foul with garbage, borne onward to the gullies; in Sandy Row peace reigned; the weather was so bad the Orangemen had not a thought to spare for their friend Pious William or their foe the Pope; at the Docks wretchedness unspeakable prevailed, miserable cattle awaiting shipment were penned together in sheds open to wind and rain; in the air there was that raw, moist chilliness which makes the Irish climate so trying; the Lough resembled a sea of liquid mud, where white-crested billows tossed restlessly; the soft green slopes of Down and the bold scenery of Antrim were alike impartially hidden from mortal eye. Belfast was looking its worst—and that worst can be very bad indeed—on the dreary summer's morning when Mr.

Muir stood splicing the handle of his whip and contemplating the pouring rain, and thinking of his rotting hay, and saying injurious things concerning St. Swithin.

In a room on the first floor of Cunningham's Hotel, which commanded the spectacle of York and Donegall Streets being swept by "sheets" of rain, sat two ladies dressed in deep mourning. Not the slightest likeness could be traced between them, yet they stood in the relation of mother and daughter. The latter was tall; her complexion pale, with the delicate creamy pallor of Mary's lilies; her eyes large, liquid, and of that dark deep blue rarely seen out of Ireland, shaded with long brown lashes that would have made them at times look black, had it not been for their tender melting softness; her face was of the truest shape of Irish beauty, narrowing somewhat to a perfect chin. (Those of my readers who have seen at Hardwicke Castle the portrait of that famous lady, Georgina Duchess of Devonshire, will understand what I mean.) Her forehead was broad, not high; her nose short, straight, and decided; her upper lip short also, and perhaps a trifle scornful, telling of a latent pride which might have been fully developed in her character had circumstances proved propitious; her mouth—but ah, how can I—with the mists of years rising between that frank sweet mouth, with its thousand suggested loves and griefs, and to-day—hope, through the cold, hard medium of pen and ink, to do justice to that most exquisite mouth! The light and shadows playing at hide-and-seek on a hillside, or chasing each other over the water, or coming and going, flickering and changing on the turf through a tracery of green leaves, could not have told more surely the story of cloud and sunshine than did the sweet lips and the sensitive curves reveal, to an understanding eye, the joy or the trouble agitating the girl's young heart. For though she had known bitter sorrow, and shed those salt tears wrung from the deepest depths of human suffering, the anguish of which can never be quite forgotten during the happiest after experience, she was still young—little more than seventeen—with only her face for

her fortune, a face which, in the opinion of her mother, could by the most partial individual only be considered a most contemptible dowry.

Twenty years previously Mrs. Boyle's beauty had been of the pink shepherdess type; what it was on that wet morning when, after an absence long as the period of her married life, she sat looking at the dreary vista of York Street, swept by driving rain, might have tried the courtesy of her old admirers to say. Under the most favourable circumstances it is a style too apt to fade, and certainly the widow had faded a good deal. The delicate rose-pink of her earlier womanhood having left her cheeks, and settled in the tip of her nose, gave to that feature a somewhat exasperating prominence not originally contemplated by Nature; her eyes, once "blue as harebells," had, with twenty years' hard wear, become, as regards the iris, well-nigh colourless; there were at the corners of her mouth and across her forehead suspicious lines, strange to see in a woman who professed to have got only half-way through the seventy years allotted to man. For thirty-five she looked extremely old; but then some persons, many persons, do look older than their actual age. Besides, she might have made a mistake concerning the date of her birth. It is only charitable to suppose she was eternally making mistakes on this subject, since, while that awkward entry in the baptismal registry showed a steady tendency to advance, the years to which she owned exhibited an even greater decision in the matter of retrogression.

Her figure was light and trim as in the days when she never lacked partners at the great Dublin parties so often referred to in the paternal home near Ballyclare; or when, in the Belfast streets, she was viewed and admired afar; and many men would have proposed to a girl who fulfilled their idea of feminine loveliness, had they been sure of the fortune with which her father—an exceedingly vulgar attorney, in rather shady practice—meant to endow his charming daughter.

The deep crape she wore "out of compliment" to her

dead husband was almost new, yet already she had begun to consider his possible successor. Belfast having been the scene of her earliest conquests, she felt an assured conviction the moment Bridge Street and Donegall Place knew her once more, fresh victories would follow.

Twenty years' daily association with persons well born, well educated, well mannered, and well cultured had failed to refine Mrs. Boyle's accent or tone of thought. Good books might never have been written, good music never composed, good pictures never painted, high aspirations never conceived, for all contact with them had done for her.

In every essential, save appearance, she was still the Milly Vince who had, between the years of grace 1820 and 1830, laughed and coquetted and giggled, and, in her own exhaustive phraseology, "put her best foot foremost," till, at the mature age of nine-and-twenty, she snared, by means of her "endearing young charms," the susceptible heart of Ulick Boyle. Whether those charms alone would have ever carried the affair beyond the confines of flirtation is open to doubt; but backed by a stern parent, who, declaring he did not mean to stand any shilly-shallying, threatened an action for "breach," they proved irresistible. Some women might have felt a delicacy about marrying when the man had to be brought to church only by dint of a legal pistol held at his ear. But the fair Milly, spite of her pink-and-white complexion and blue eyes, and fragile person and little affectations of timidity, did not allow any scruples of that sort to come between her and happiness. "Though, indeed, taking Ulick Boyle was the worst day's work I ever did," she had said not less than three hundred and sixty-five times a year during the course of her married life. "I often wonder he has the face to look at me, deceiving a girl as he did. If my poor father hadn't thought he was just rolling in riches he'd never have let me said a word to him;" which was, indeed, a most unjust libel on the excellent sense of that astute individual.

"I wonder if Richard's never coming," began Mrs. Boyle,

after vainly craning her head so as to try to obtain a glimpse of the open door below. "I'm tired out waiting for him."

"It is not twelve yet, mamma," answered Miss Boyle; "and Mr. Vince's note said he could not possibly call before noon."

"There you go with your mammas, and your noons, and your Mr. Vinces. Why can't you talk plain English, and speak as I do? and if I've told you once I've told you a hundred times not to be calling me 'mamma, mamma, mamma,' for ever and ever. What's the good of setting people wondering to see a young woman like myself with a great maypole of a girl by my side? I can't be telling every stranger I was married at fifteen, and indeed before."

"I am very sorry," murmured the "maypole." "I forgot."

"You forgot, indeed! it's always forgot, forgot, forgot with you. If I forgot as you do, I wonder what would become of us. It's well I have head enough for a dozen; and that minds me I'm fairly starving with the hunger. Fetch down that bone of the turkey. I had scarcely a bite at breakfast. I've got bread I cut before the waiter came to take the things away. You'd never have thought of doing that, I'll be bound."

"I do not think I should," answered Miss Boyle.

"You won't do much good in the world if you do not keep your wits about you. There never was a Vince yet hadn't more than his share. Put them where you like they're sure to light on their feet. Now run up-stairs and fetch that morsel of food. I'm fit to faint. What are you waiting for? You've got the key of the box."

"Do you think it would be well to bring it down just now? Supposing Mr. Vince came—"

"Well, supposing he did? The man is aware we must eat sometimes, though it's little enough contents me, goodness knows; and don't anger me by calling him Mr. Vince. He was christened Richard, and nobody I ever heard of, except my father, shortened the name to Dick."

"But I really could not—"

"Why couldn't you? What would hinder you?"

"It would seem such a liberty."

"Liberty, indeed!" repeated Mrs. Boyle, with a sarcastic laugh. "Liberty! and Richard Vince my own father's brother's son!"

"Yes; but I have never seen him, and he must be years older than I am, and—"

"O! get along with you, do; never let me hear you talking folly like that again; and don't be putting affronts on my relations, who are the only people now able and willing to help us. Where would you be at this minute, I should be glad to know, if it wasn't for my cousin Richard?"

Judging from the expression of Miss Boyle's face, she would have preferred almost any other place to that precise portion of the earth where she stood, through no wish or fault of her own.

"Shall I get the turkey?" she inquired, in the tone of a person who did not much relish the commission.

"*Shall* you get the turkey?" repeated the widow, with withering scorn. "Yes, you will get the turkey, if you don't want to see me drop down with exhaustion; and when you come back shoot the bolt, that Richard mayn't catch us. Now make haste, and don't let me have to speak to you again."

Facing the inevitable as if it had been a tiger, Miss Boyle braced her courage for the event, and proceeded in search of the remains of that wretched bird, for twenty-four hours previously the cause of much care and trouble. Less diplomacy has served to annex a state or cede a territory than was rendered necessary by Mrs. Boyle's determination at once to eat fowl and yet keep it out of the hotel bills.

Her daughter could not have touched a morsel of the creature had even great interests depended on her doing so; while the widow considered it the correct thing largely to partake of the delicacy. Most of the bird was gone; indeed, the whole of it, except one leg of goodly proportions, and Mrs. Boyle had herself consumed the whole, save the bones, which she

in an unpretending and primitive manner picked very bare indeed.

"Do have a bit, Berna," she hospitably entreated, unfolding a newspaper wrapping up the bird, and spreading it like a tablecloth over her knees. "It's a beautiful turkey, and we needn't be leaving any of it over. We'll be in clover now we are here. Richard 'll see to us. I wouldn't wonder if he took us straight off in a covered car to Craigvallen. I've told you before he has a place there just a very sight for beauty, lawns as smooth as velvet, flowers the scent of which is enough to take away your breath; fishponds, as if there were not fish of all sorts and to spare in the Lough. You've heard talk of Carrick oysters; you'll taste them now. O, there are grand times in store for you if only you won't be turning your back on good luck, as your father was so fond of doing! Well, as I was telling you about Craigvallen, there's not a tree or shrub you could name but's in the grounds. They're just for all the world, as far as I can understand, like the garden of Eden, only Richard has no wild beasts. Why don't you eat, girl, and get some colour in your cheeks? I'm sure I dread my relations seeing you—they'll say you can be no child of mine. But that you're well grown—though you're slight and useless as a willow wand—I'd think the fairies had changed you in your cradle. There now, take that away; why don't you heed what I say, and your cousin's foot on the stair? For goodness' sake, Berna, put the bone somewhere—anywhere; and, stop a minute; is my hair smooth? O this cap—this cap, that makes the best of looking women frights, weary on it, and just when I was wanting to be at my best, too! Do you mean to open that door to-day? Don't you know the man's bruising his knuckles rapping? and all the Vincés had nice hands.—I'm so sorry, Richard, you were kept waiting. There's something wrong with the catch, I think;" and, uttering this huge falsehood, Mrs. Boyle, simpering coquettishly, ambled up to her cousin and presented her hand for his acceptance, a kindness she would have supplemented with the addition of her cheek,

but that Mr. Vince looked so unlikely a person to feel grateful for such an attention, the delicate idea was nipped in the bud.

"And so here's yourself at last," said the widow, in a light and sportive manner. "How are you?"

With grave deliberation Mr. Vince intimated he was pretty well; he considered the weather trying, but, upon the whole, he felt thankful to say he could give a tolerably good report of his health.

"I wish I could say as much," sighed Mrs. Boyle, with a downward glance at her crape; "I have had so much to go through, I wonder I'm alive."

"I was very sorry indeed to hear of your loss," said Mr. Vince—he had previously written to state as much, and he now most heartily wished that rash proceeding could be undone.

"You needn't tell me you were sorry," cried the widow effusively; "all my family had feeling hearts. O, this is Berna—*his* daughter, you know! You did not see her when you were with us."

No, Mr. Vince had not seen the young person thus introduced; and something in his tone and the way he shook hands conveyed the idea that if he had not seen her then he could have survived the disappointment.

"I was greatly surprised to find you were in Belfast," he remarked to Mrs. Boyle after these amenities, at the same time, in compliance with that lady's earnest entreaties, "sitting down off his feet."

"And where else could we come, except to Belfast?" asked the widow.

"Rather a difficult question to answer off-hand; but I should have thought there were many places more agreeable and attractive."

"My own notion," retorted Mrs. Boyle, "is, no place is so pleasant as among your own people, if you are rich; and I don't consider any place can be so suitable if you are poor."

"I trust the latter is not your case," said Mr. Vince, who was becoming seriously uneasy.

"Why, don't you know?—haven't you heard?"

"Certainly not; how should I know or hear?"

"I made sure somebody had told you I was thrown on the world without a sixpence. As I said to Berna when your letter came, apologising for not attending the funeral, and trusting I would write if you could be of any assistance, 'Now, that's the Vinces all over—they're never behind when any friend is sick or sorry.'"

To judge from the expression of Mr. Vince's grim face, no man ever lived less desirous of playing the part of "Good Samaritan."

"I scarcely understand," he remarked, ignoring the inferred compliment to his own excellent qualities. "Do you mean that Mr. Boyle made no provision for you in the event of his death?"

"That's just what I do mean—and I don't wonder at your being indignant at the way I've been treated. If I'd only known—but there's no use fretting over spilt milk; and nobody can deny it's spilt milk for me to be left a widow with a great girl to keep, on a paltry sixty pounds a year."

"But I thought you said you had nothing?"

"And what's sixty pounds?"

"Over twenty-three shillings a week—"

"Just about enough to buy boot-laces—"

"I think you could scarcely spend twenty-three shillings a week on boot-laces," remonstrated Mr. Vince, with the most absurd and anxious gravity. "Many persons live on less."

"And I wouldn't have had even that pittance if it hadn't been for my father," explained Mrs. Boyle, who felt the aspect of affairs was getting serious; "he insisted—O, he knew the nature of the man I was marrying!—that Ulick should insure his life. He didn't want to do anything of the sort, and he wouldn't put his money like another person in the office the old man recommended. No. The 'Scottish Widows' was the only thing that took his fancy."

'It seems to me, Boyle,' said my father—you know he always would have his joke—'you might just as well put your premiums at the back of the fire. I don't know about Scottish widows, but I don't think an Irish widow would stop one long.' It was just a harmless piece of fun, but Ulick sulked for a week about it."

Involuntarily Mr. Vince turned towards the sofa where Berna sat, leaning against the cushion she knew concealed the bare thigh-bone of that horrible bird. He fancied she had spoken; but she was utterly still, her head turned towards the window, her hands clasped tight together in her lap.

"I do not suppose the question of marriage would affect your annuity," he remarked; beyond all other things Mr. Vince was practical—"business to the backbone" declared his admirers.

"O, it is not of myself I'm thinking!" explained Mrs. Boyle; "it's that girl. What would become of her if I was taken—and as the Holy Bible truly says, 'In the midst of life we're in death'—I can't imagine; she hasn't a bit of pluck in her."

"Do not trouble yourself about me, mamma," entreated Miss Boyle, again forgetful of the maternal mandate.

"It's all very well to say don't trouble, but how am I to help troubling? If you can tell me that, I'll be very much obliged to you."

"Will not your husband's grandmother?—I always thought—" hesitated Mr. Vince, finding the girl seemed unable or unwilling to solve the conundrum proposed.

"And you thought right enough," said Mrs. Boyle; "the old lady is just rolling in wealth. She has her servants, and her carriages, and her fine house, and her gold, and her silver, and her plate, and her jewels; and is wrapped up in her money, when she ought to be considering her sinful soul, and how soon she'll have to appear before her Maker. And Berna had the finest chance ever was of coming in for the whole of it. I declare when I think of her foolishness I could sit down

and cry my eyes out. When she wanted a day or two of sixteen she had her choice. All the Dowager asked her to do was to give up her home and me and be made for life; and she wouldn't. As if I hadn't trouble enough without her making more for me."

"But, surely, you cannot find fault with your daughter because she refused to give up her mother," expostulated Mr. Vince, who felt, however extraordinary Miss Boyle's preference might be, it was one he ought to commend.

"I'm not finding fault with her for that; as I told her, where would you find a mother like me?"

Mr. Vince was about as destitute of all sense of humour as an Irishman ever can be. Yet Mrs. Boyle's question tickled his fancy to such a degree he could not avoid smiling as he said,

"There is a good deal in that, to be sure."

"There's everything," answered the widow; "and for that reason she ought to have taken advice, and been led by one a little older and ever so much wiser than herself. But she's her father's daughter all over—looks and nature—headstrong as he was. If he'd only listened to me he might have been spared to see whether there was nothing he could do for us; but he never thought of anybody but himself—"

"Mamma!" interposed Berna.

"You needn't fire up. I'm not speaking against him. Only if he hadn't, just for contrariness, ridden that chestnut—"

"Really, I do think, Mrs. Boyle—"

"And you call me Mrs. Boyle—me, your father's brother's own child—what'll become of us!—and I made sure you'd be as glad to see me as my husband was you. Why, if I'd let him, he'd have turned the house out of window to do you honour, he was that pleased to see one belonging to me inside his doors. Not ten minutes ago I was saying to Berna, Richard 'll be ordering an inside car and taking us straight off to Craigvallen, and showing us his grand place, and making us acquainted with his fine wife."

The peril was so imminent, Mr. Vince felt he dare not lose a moment.

"I am excessively sorry," he said, "but it's quite impossible I should ask you to my house. Mrs. Vince would not hear of such a thing for a moment."

For about the space of time it would have taken any one to count five, Mrs. Boyle remained gazing at her kinsman with wild incredulity, then exclaiming, "And here am I stranded on the faith of what you'd do for me," she burst into a perfectly real and unaffected passion of tears.

"Mamma, mamma!" cried Berna, and, forgetful of the dreadful thing wrapped up in newspaper buried beneath the sofa pillow, she hurriedly crossed the room, and, kneeling on the carpet, threw her arms around a mother whose "like" she would, happily, have found it difficult to find.

CHAPTER III.

MR. RICHARD C. VINCE was a gentleman "universally respected." In other words, he had done remarkably well.

"By dint of indefatigable industry and an extraordinary aptitude for business"—*vide* the local papers when on one occasion it became expedient for them to laud their respected fellow-townsmen—"he had raised himself from comparative obscurity to the topmost rung of the commercial ladder. Men such as he had made Ulster what it was. Men such as he would preserve Ulster as it was. So long as men of the stamp of Richard Charles Vince remained in their midst," editors felt there "could be no reason to despair of the future of Ireland." "Public spirit, private charity, a generosity as unstinted as unflinching," were all united in the person of Mr. Vince; and when that good man and true gave a fête and threw his grounds open to the masses, on the "never-to-be-forgotten occasion" of his entering into possession of Craigvallen, a correspondent of the *Lagan Flying Post* actually drivelled while shedding inky tears over the wealth and virtues of Richard Charles.

If there were persons who, in narrow town houses and small suburban villas, said Mr. Vince had on occasion sailed remarkably near the wind, the observation proved nothing, except that they were poor and non-successful. All great men have their detractors; and, in his way, Mr. Vince was a very great man indeed.

Whatever the course he sailed may have been, it enabled him to arrive in port with a rich cargo. When first he took his seat on a stool in the office of Messrs. Hughes, the great corn merchants, his weekly stipend only amounted to five

shillings ; and less than thirty years later he was in a position to buy Craigvallen from Sir Humphrey Trevane, Baronet, and to marry Marcella Robina, third daughter of the late Theophilus Carpenter, Esq., of Cherryfield, a gentleman who travelled the road to ruin in a coach-and-four.

It was this lady, popular opinion believed, who "turned" Richard Charles from Presbyterianism to the "Establishment;" but that estimable man's enemies sneeringly said he was glad enough to go the way he wanted under the shelter of a woman's petticoats.

The Rev. Dr. Cooke—affectionately nicknamed "the Cock of the North"—declared that "when people got rich enough to set up a jaunting-car, they ceased walking to meeting and drove to church."

Mr. Vince's conversion was delayed till after the purchase of a carriage-and-pair. If he could have combined the society of great persons and the Westminster Confession of Faith, it is possible he might never have left his old religion ; but it was easier to step from church into the grand houses, the doors of which were opened for him and his wife ; and he retained the good word and will of the Presbyterians by benefactions which they styled "princely," and deeds properly described as "worthy."

His life was, indeed, spent in "conciliating"—irreverent persons said something about Vince trying to hedge for this world and the next, and quoted that text which warns a person to fear when all men speak well of him ; but there can be no question Mr. Vince did an enormous amount of good, and charity is a gift-horse that certainly ought not to be looked too closely in the mouth.

Sprung almost from the people himself, his greatest pride was to associate with those vaguely designated by the lower orders in Ireland "the quality." He did like a man able to trace a long line of aristocratic ancestors. Ulick Boyle, of Boyle Court, county Mayo, had always been a great feather in his cap ; and when he wrote to his cousin, whom he had never,

even in his youngest and her best days, either liked or admired, offering his condolences on the death of a man descended not merely from an old but a wealthy stock, he was perfectly sincere in saying, if he could take any trouble off her hands she might command his services. What he meant was that as the Boyles had property in the county Down he could see to anything connected with it for her; the idea that she would come rushing to Belfast herself never entered his mind. The imagination of woman is, however, quicker than that of man; and the moment Mrs. Vince heard of Mrs. Boyle's advent, she said, "She has come intending to plant herself on us for a long visit."

"Then her expectations will be disappointed," thought Mr. Vince, but he possessed his soul in silence.

He had known his cousin Milly as maid and matron, and he did not wish his wife to know her as a widow. He had seen her giggling, flirting, coquetting with many sorts and conditions of men; and he secretly determined the sacred threshold of Craigvallen, once inhabited by "the best in the county," should not be crossed by her profane feet. Without ever actually turning a cold shoulder to the whole dreadful Vince connection, he had managed to keep his many, many relations at arm's length. He helped, advised, and occasionally found money for them; but they thoroughly understood such benefits were not to be presumed upon, or made the excuse for any "hail, fellow, well met" sort of familiarity. Richard Charles was Mr. Vince to them all round; indeed, Richard Charles was Mr. Vince to most persons except Mrs. Vince, who, considering formality between man and wife bad form, called him Richard from the day she consented to be his.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Boyle," he began, a little awkwardly, for the spectacle of Ulick Boyle's widow dissolved in tears, and the sight of Ulick Boyle's generous heart looking at him through the dead man's daughter's eyes, seemed for the moment rather more than he could bear.

"No, Richard Vince, you are not sorry," sobbed Mrs.

Boyle; "and it is no use your sitting there and telling me what you know is not true. All you want is to give me the cut go-by; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself, sitting there calling your first cousin on the father's side Mrs. Boyle. But it is just what I might have expected; when poverty comes in at the door, friends jump out of the window. They do, as if it was a fire. Get up, Berna; don't be kneeling there, spoiling your crape on the dusty carpet; you'll have to be careful of your clothes, for dear only knows when you'll get any more."

"It is a very hard position," ventured Mr. Vince, who felt it was exceedingly hard for him; "but if you would only look it sensibly in the face, we—"

"Talk's cheap," interrupted the widow. "From a boy you'd always the gift of the gab. No, it's no use, Berna; I'll just say out what's in my mind, and then if I'm no richer I'll be easier—for goodness' sake, girl, let go hold of my arm, you'll have it black and blue, pinching it like that; you know a fair skin like mine marks in a minute."

"I assure you—" tried Mr. Vince, in vain expostulation.

"I tell you it's no manner of use thinking to deceive me. I have known you all my life, and I never knew much good of you; and it is a burning shame for you to treat your own full-blood cousin, whose father gave you the first shove you ever had from shore, as if she was dirt under your feet, not fit to be spoken to. I wouldn't be as unkind to a dog as you have been to me; and after me always sticking up for my own family too. I never said an ill word about one of the Vinces. Did I, Berna?"

"I never heard you, inamma," agreed Berna, who had, after that little misfortune in regard to her mother's "fair skin," risen from the floor and resumed her seat beside the turkey's thigh-bone.

"There now, you hear what she says? You mightn't take my word, but you can't be off believing her. Not but what I could have found plenty bad to tell if I'd liked to tell it. I

haven't forgot how your father took Cripple's Farm over the head of that quiet decent woman, Tom Dunnan's widow ; ay, and sure enough he hadn't a day's luck after it, and maybe your luck, Richard, may turn yet. And I mind me how Tim Vince—that's your uncle and mine, you know—cheated young Craig over the black mare he sold him at Straid, and how if it hadn't been for my father, whose daughter you think so little of—"

"If you have the slightest influence over your mother," said Mr. Vince, addressing Berna, and drowning the final portion of Mrs. Boyle's denunciation with his harsh deep tones, "will you advise her to cease this crazy rambling, and let us discuss her future plans in a reasonable spirit?"

The sneer with which his kinswoman greeted a suggestion, by no means ridiculous, amounted to a snort. Construing the words of Richard Charles into a sign of weakness, she determined to have another round, and accordingly recommenced.

"It'll be a fine story for me to tell Matilda Sheill, and the rest of them, how, not content with turning up your nose at me yourself, you tried to set my own child against her mother. She was self-willed enough, goodness knows, before. I don't know what she'll be like now she's got the master of Craiggallen and the husband of old Theoph. Carpenter's daughter to back her up in her undutiful ways."

"O mamma, I'm not undutiful ; indeed, indeed I am not !" said the girl.

"And lest I should, for the second time, prove inadvertently the cause of arousing your resentment against a young lady I most sincerely pity, I will bid you good-morning," remarked Mr. Vince, in his best and most stately manner.

"You're not going off in that way !" cried Mrs. Boyle, jumping up as she saw Richard Charles advancing to shake hands with her daughter, whose eyes were swimming in tears. "You're never going to leave me, without a friend in the world I can turn to, and with a child who hasn't the faintest chance of making a good match and setting us all up again !

I didn't mean to anger you. I wouldn't give 'Tilda Sheill, or one of them, the satisfaction of saying, 'The Vincés have been at it again. It's Milly and Richard aren't on speaking terms now.'"

"I am afraid, if your friend Miss Sheill confines herself to the truth, that is precisely what she will have to say," retorted Mr. Vince.

"Don't go!" entreated the widow; "don't go for my sake, and don't be vexed with me. Sure that was only my fun about Craigvallen. I wouldn't be paid to drive out there—tiring myself looking at things that can never do me any good. All I want is a roof to cover my head and put my boxes under. I was thinking we, maybe, might get some quiet lodging at Mount Pottinger, or along the Botanic Road. I don't care what it is like, so that we can just turn ourselves round."

Instantly there arose before Mr. Vince's mind a vision of the fascinating Milly, as he remembered her in that evil time departed, ere Mr. Ulick Boyle at one and the same moment tied such a millstone round his own neck and relieved the Vince connection from the burden of a woman who had rendered the lives of all her relations a weariness and a terror.

He could see again her veil floating in the wind, her scarf dropping off her shoulders, her unduly short and scanty skirts, beneath which sandalled shoes and "clocked" open-worked stockings were as much in evidence as her pink cheeks and golden curls, and "heavenly" blue eyes under the brim of the enormous bonnets in vogue when she was in her teens, and long after. She knew a family resident in the Shankhill Road, and from the fastnesses of that locality she was wont to make desperate descents on the youth and manhood of Belfast.

Twenty times a day she was to be seen in company with two or three girls of her acquaintance passing and repassing the news-room. Hercules Street, High Street, Bridge Street, Donegall Street, North Street, Rosemary Street, and High Street again, that was the usual round of the charming damsels, with occasional forays along Donegall Place and a rush for

raspberry-puffs into the Corn Market and Kitty Linden's, from whence a strategic movement was often made into Ann Street, in order to see whether any fresh supplies could be wrung from papa.

And now she was a widow, and the world had gone on ; and poor Mr. Vince, compelled constantly to frequent all these places of public resort, thought how awful it would be to meet a streaming crape veil, and a voluminous black shawl, and that little lithe figure, and that washed-out complexion at high noon "where men do congregate."

He could not do it. Life would not be worth having. He must make some terms with her ; money was no object in comparison to getting rid of Mrs. Boyle.

"There are many places," he began, "where living is so much cheaper than in a large town, that—"

"No, thank you," interrupted the widow ; "it was bad enough when there was plenty and to spare, where we'd be a month at a time without a soul, besides beggars coming to the house, except the priest and the rector ; and now I'm in a manner destitute, I don't mean to settle myself down where there's not a creature to speak to, and not a thing to see but bog and the Atlantic."

"Then why not go to Dublin—"

"Why not go to New York ?"

"Why should you not ?" asked Mr. Vince eagerly, too eagerly by far.

"For the same good reason I'm not going to Dublin. What would become of me, where I don't know man, woman, or child ? No, I've friends here, and here I mean to stay ; and whenever it clears up a bit I'll put on my bonnet and call on a few I know, and maybe they'll put me in the way of getting a couple of cheap rooms, for an hotel is ruin ; there's no other name for it."

"My time is valuable, and as I cannot possibly assist you in your search for lodgings, I will bid you good-bye," said Mr. Vince, with great decision.

“Well, you have the temper!” exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. “I wouldn’t own one like it for all the money in the Bank of Ireland; ay, that’s the way your father went off the morning—” But her words fell only on Berna’s unwilling ears—Mr. Vince, in despair, had left the room, and was half-way down-stairs. The widow was too much for him. What sin could he have committed to call down this judgment? He had been too prosperous, too much uplifted; he had gone once to a Catholic church in Paris; he had discharged a clerk in anger, and refused to give him a character, and he believed that man was now in the workhouse.

He would see what he could do for him; he would try to get into Parliament, and move Heaven and earth, to rush a bill through the House doing away with all relationships except those of man and wife, parent and child. He knew he could make a telling speech on such a subject. It was awful, it was most unjust, that a man like himself, who had worked hard all his life, and been reasonable, and made the name of Vince respected and respectable, should, now he was past fifty, have such a cousin as Mrs. Boyle planted down in his locality. It was horrible. Even in a nightmare he had never suffered such agonies, and all because he would not ask her to Craigvallen. He felt he should prefer, if it came to that point, to sell Craigvallen and go abroad, rather than have the dread and fear of his cousin Milly on his mind. That day all things went wrong with Mr. Vince. If the ever-vernal Milly had come into Belfast with sound of trumpet and beat of drum and proclamation of herald he could not more utterly have been possessed by the feeling that the whole Corporation was aware of the fact the charming widow was stopping in Cunningham’s Hotel. It would not be long—at all events, his reason told him so—before half the town was aware of her presence.

He had boasted about the Boyle connection; he had talked familiarly concerning the view from Boyle Court; the speed and stay of Mr. Boyle’s hunters, the number of acres he owned, his shore and mountain rights, his tenants, his grandmother, his

second cousin, Sir Herbert Boyle, who, having done great deeds out in Afghanistan, was knighted by her gracious Majesty Queen Victoria; and now here was the widow of that same Mr. Ulick Boyle back again in Ulster, lacking a penny, figuratively speaking, to bless herself with, and by far a greater fool—so it seemed to the unhappy merchant—than before her marriage.

Richard Charles felt that altogether the humiliation was more than he could bear; the business salt even lost its savour, and there seemed nothing left wherewith the desert of his life could be fertilised. As for blossoming like the rose, that was now impossible. Never—never since Good Fortune (seeing what a nice, steady, sanctimonious, utterly respectable young man had come up from Ballynure) adopted him for her own—did a sensation of more utter wretchedness paralyse all his energies. Irritable himself, he was the cause of irritability in others. “The weather had got into his temper,” the clerks declared; and then they cursed the weather in a most improper manner, and made the office-boys scapegoats on whom they laid all manner of crimes and shortcomings, and drove them out into the rain without compunction, as, of old, the Israelites cheerfully sent the sin-laden beast over the burning sands of that terrible wilderness their own feet had trodden.

“You poor dear man!” said Mrs. Vince, when, after dinner, she was told the whole story (Mr. Vince did not even try to keep the full horror of what had come to town from his wife’s knowledge). “Somehow you have managed to totally mismanage your delightful relation. I shall go and see her. I am very, very sure she won’t talk that sort of nonsense to me.”

“But, Marcella, I really do not like your coming into contact with such a woman,” replied her husband.

“Leave all that to me,” was the cheerful answer; and happy now he had confessed the worst, and feeling assured he could not possibly leave the whole matter in better hands, Mr. Vince leant back in his solid mahogany morocco-covered easy-chair, and sank into a blissful nap.

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING, as it seemed, done his best to ruin the hay crop of the whole of the North of Ireland, the good Saint Swithin suddenly relented, and, except for an occasional shower, called, according to the taste of the speaker, a "dribble," a "spurt," or a "few drops for heat," did no further real injury.

The rich, long grass, "laid" so hopelessly by twenty-four hours' incessant rain, was at length cut, and "in swath." Much of it had, however, still to be scattered and dried; "but if," said Mr. Muir, "with the Lord's help, we're able to get it into cock before more rain comes, we'll do yet."

It was at breakfast, seven anxious days after that morning when he stood splicing his gig-whip and "threeping" with Bell, who, in the long-run, generally got the best of such encounters, that Mr. Muir made this statement for any one to appropriate who pleased.

As it happened, no one did appropriate or even verbally notice it. "The Ensign" shot a telling glance at Carline, which Miss Muir intercepted. The five children invited over for "the haymaking, to toss and ted," were looking ruefully at their messes of semi-cold porridge—served in soup-plates. Mr. Muir's second daughter was absent, superintending the frying of a further supply of bacon and eggs—fat bacon, salt, moreover, and eggs fried in that fat—and there was no one else present.

As a rule, Mr. Muir so far unbent as to take his meals in the kitchen. It was a cheerful kitchen, well lighted, with red-tiled floor, walls coloured a tint of warm yellow ochre, a fire-place large enough to roast an ox, generally well filled with blazing peat, over which, on a massive crane, hung suspended

a huge pot, or burly kettle, or leviathan griddle, according to the nature of the food in preparation. There was nothing to object to about the kitchen, with its well-scrubbed dresser ornamented to overflowing with homely delft, its walls decorated with lids of copper and tin, in which, as in convex mirrors, the faces of the family were reflected lugubriously lengthened, its warmth, its look of plenty increased by the flitches of bacon and rounds of hung beef depending from great hooks in the ceiling ; its hearth littered with feathery ashes from the glowing turf ; its look-out into the farmyard, with just a glimpse of orchard and waving trees beyond ; the great oven, in which myriad tarts and tartlets, destined to be consumed by "the best in the land," had been baked to a turn in the days which were departed ; but when the young officer declared himself sufficiently recovered from the effects of the awful accident, that threw him maimed and insensible on the hospitality of a man he only knew as a sort of eccentric horse-dealer, to be able to leave his sleeping apartment and join the family circle, Mr. Muir's fiat went forth.

"We'll eat in the parlour while the Ensign stops here, Bell," said that estimable maiden's papa ; "and don't be stinting us in the tea, and we'll have white sugar instead of brown ; I'll fetch it for you from Forster Green's ; and get out the good cloths your mother brought me, the Ardoyne damask, with the beautiful wreaths of convolvulus running all over it as natural as among the gooseberry bushes 'out by' in the garden."

"I like the two with the rose, shamrock, and thistle in posies dotted about, or that pair where the bunches of lilies are tied up by true lovers' knots, best myself," urged Miss Muir, the spirit of contradiction and a hatred of anything flowing and unsymmetrical stirring well within her heart.

"Never mind you, Bell, what you like and dislike," returned her genial companion ; "you do what I tell you. Bring out the finest and best Ardoyne can do, and some day we'll ask the young man who has dined with Baronets and Earls whether

England, spite of all her money, can show better work than Michael Andrews turns out in the old place at Ardoyne, where the sun peeps in through the low wide sashes, and the men can see the tremble of green leaves and hear the songs of wild birds standing before their Jacquard looms."

"If you go on praising Ireland that way to the Ensign, he'll be telling you one day she's just what the English make her out."

"And that's—?" said Mr. Muir, interrogatively and defiantly.

"Not much to boast about," returned the fair Bell, reluctantly leaving the room to find those hoarded cloths, concerning which her father had spoken.

Between herself and the young officer there existed a sort of armed neutrality, the lines of which were being constantly overstepped by one or other of the high contracting powers: now it was Miss Muir who stealthily made a sly flank movement; again it was her opponent, who gave the lady what she called a "slap with his tongue." There was no possible subject concerning which they failed to disagree; and Mr. Muir was wont to sit enjoying the war of words, glad at heart to hear Bell getting the worst of the encounter. "The Ensign has a calm sort of way with him you can make no head against," the farmer constantly told his daughter; "you had best take advice, my woman, and let him alone."

"He won't let me alone," answered Miss Muir; "and it is just beyond my patience to see him treated, as he is, like some wee god. He hasn't a thought to spare for anything but himself, as you'll maybe find out to your cost some day. Look at the money we've been out already over him; and all the thanks you need ever look for will be just a jeer. I don't know what you see about him, I'm sure; and as for Carline—"

"What of her?" asked Mr. Muir sharply.

"O, not much; but likely you'll find it enough!" retorted Bell, who was wildly jealous of her half-sister's lovely face, and whose accusations generally took the form of hint or innuendo. According to Bell the wit and wisdom and sagacity of the

whole household were concentrated in her own homely person. She thought more than anybody ; she suspected things which no one else ever thought of ; she was a detective officer and a prophet of evil conjoined ; and Mr. Muir disliked her as much as he could " one of his own blood."

" If you speak at all, Bell," he said, " it would be as well if you'd speak out."

" I make no doubt I could find plenty to speak about," she replied ; " but it mightn't be quite agreeable."

Mr. Muir thought of this oracular utterance as he looked at Carline and the officer, who faced each other. He had thought of it and various other dark sayings let drop from time to time by the immaculate Bell ; but the hay and the weather, and a perplexity he was in about his son, had hitherto prevented that fitting of two and two together he felt necessary to make a good job of the matter. Now, however, a something indefinable about Carline's downcast eyes, and the manner in which she handed bread across to the officer, caused him to wonder when that young man would be well enough to return to head-quarters.

He wanted to buy a horse before leaving Ardilaw, but Ensign Ludham seemed to be in no more violent hurry to conclude that purchase than to confess himself quite off the sick list. " I must do something," was Mr. Muir's mental conclusion, and then he asked his guest,

" Are you not for any porridge, Ensign, before you've your breakfast ? There is nothing like a basin of it and about a pint of milk for starting the day."

" Thank you, Mr. Muir. I am sure you are sincere in your views ; but if the day can only be started satisfactorily on porridge, I should prefer never starting it at all."

" Some day you may be glad to get porridge," broke in Miss Muir.

" I have sinned, I admit," returned her adversary ; " but I really do not think I have sinned sufficiently to deserve such a punishment."

"It is a shame to hear you abuse good food that way, and before the children, too," persisted Bell.

"Ah, I forgot the children; and one ought always to be moral before the young! My dears, if you eat a few pounds of boiled meal every morning you will grow up healthy, happy, and wise; if you do not you will fall into evil courses, and probably come to want even a cold potato. There, Miss Muir, could your favourite minister have delivered a better discourse?"

"They'll have to make haste and finish, or we'll have night on us before they get out into the fields," interposed Mr. Muir, who did not at all relish this incursion of innocent life, and often informed his daughter the "imps spoilt more nor they made." "What with burying one another in it, and rolling and stretching themselves their length, the hay is not fit for a cow to eat, let alone a horse. I had to take a whip to them yesterday; the grass in the upland had just been put into cop when they came tearing down from the paddock, leaving the gate wide after them. In five minutes, ay, in two, every cop was flat, the three colts galloping about like mad, and the children clapping hands and hurrooing till you'd have thought the Siege of Derry was on again. Yes, just let me catch you at such a game a second time, and I'll not merely chastise you myself, but I'll walk you over to your father, and you'll see what he'll give you."

"It is the unknown which is always terrible," observed Ensign Ludham, as the small sinners drooped their heads, and meekly devoured their messes of pottage.

"I'm thinking they know all about it well enough," said Miss Muir, eager for another round. "They've felt the weight of their father's hand often enough."

"How touching! What a delightful thing to possess such a father!"

"Here's Sam Dopp," exclaimed all the children in a breath.

"They are not able to make any noise, are they?" said

the young officer. "There are few things more exhilarating than to hear five sets of lungs shouting as with one mouth."

"Would you have the poor things never open their lips?" asked Miss Muir, in stern reproach.

"I wonder what can be bringing Sam over here to-day, and his own hay only half cut?" mumbled Mr. Muir.

Mr. Sam Dopp put in a personal appearance in answer to that question. Just as the farmer finished his sentence the veritable Sam—who was rather a slouching sort of individual, with eyes that did not exactly match—opened the door and looked solemnly in. Then, he said he wouldn't intrude—he wanted to speak a word, but there was no hurry—he would step "out by" and "throw his eye" over the stable—he had breakfasted—"thank you all the same."

"Come in and sit down, man," expostulated Mr. Muir; "if you won't eat you can look on, and it is not totally impossible you might fancy a bit of bacon after your walk. This is Ensign Ludham, that got the smashing fall you've heard tell of." Whereupon, with cruel and elaborate civility, Ensign Ludham rose, bowed and offered Mr. Sam his chair, but Sam would have none of it.

"Don't put yourself out of the way, sir, for me," he entreated. "I'll do very well here;" and he took a seat as remote from the table and as inconvenient for purposes of conversation as was procurable.

"Now, children," began Mr. Muir, "if you can find nothing to do here but to sit staring, you might as well go into the field. Mind what I told you," he added, as they filed out of the room; "you'll go home, sure as you're living, if you don't behave yourselves."

"If I behave myself very well indeed, Mr. Muir, may I not go into the field and toss hay too?" asked the Ensign. "I think it would make me feel quite young again."

"And I think you had better take care of yourself for a day or two more. The sooner you get strong, the sooner

you'll be able to go back to your work. I am sure your colonel must be breaking his heart to see you again."

"I imagine he must. As you are aware, Miss Muir, I am universally loved and respected."

"That is a good hearing," sneered Bell.

"I had to pass the office this morning, and so I thought I might as well ask if they had a letter for you," said Mr. Dopp, wrestling with the torn lining of his coat before he could find the pocket where he had deposited something belonging to Mr. Muir. "O, here it is! They said it was from your son, and you'd be glad to get it early."

"Do they open your correspondence at the post-office, then, Mr. Muir?" asked his guest.

"They know the writing," answered the farmer, even more curtly than was his habit.

He did not open the letter, though his fingers were itching to do so; but sat twirling it round and round, waiting for Mr. Dopp's next word.

Finding that word did not come, however, he himself took the initiative.

"And what can I do for you this fine morning?" he asked.

"Well, I just stepped round to know if you had thought better about the cottage;" and Mr. Dopp turned his head and stared straight out of the window while waiting for Mr. Muir's reply, which did not immediately ensue. "I don't think the pigs would do you any hurt," went on Sam, in a mournful monotone; "they're wholesome creatures, and I'd build the sty myself. You see, I must be clear out by November; and it is ill to have to be looking for a house at that time of the year if you've a lot of young ones."

This remark, which seemed addressed to the landscape rather than to Mr. Muir, was received by that gentleman in dead silence. He drank a cup of tea, while Bell sat eyeing him eagerly, before he answered.

"We've no call to argue the matter any more, Sam. If I

had the will I could not set you the place now. It is out of my hands. I've set it."

"Preserve us!" exclaimed Miss Muir. "When did you do that?"

"The last day I was in the town."

"And you never 'let on' a word of what you had done!"

"Why would I be talking about my concerns? There are plenty of women going open-mouthed about the world."

"But you couldn't keep it a secret for ever, and you might as well have told us about your good fortune at first as at last."

"I am the best judge of that."

"Let us hope your father has found a tenant to his mind, Miss Muir," mischievously suggested Ensign Ludham, who indeed felt jubilant over Bell's discomfiture.

"It is early days to know much about him, whoever he may be," retorted the lady.

"If you must know, it is not a him at all. It is a widow woman, with the best of relations."

"You had better be careful, Mr. Muir," said the officer, laughing.

"I mean to be; there is not the woman born I'd care to bring home again. I've had three wives, and that's enough for me."

"You do not want to be too greedy."

"No; I'll content myself now; but all this won't get the hay up. I must be going;" and with a nod to Mr. Dopp, who, since the uprooting of all those hopes so sedulously nursed by Bell, had sat like one dazed by some startling intelligence, the farmer left the room, and proceeding to the kitchen, which was entirely deserted, sat down to read his letter. He went over its contents three times, then he went up to his bedroom and locked it away. After that he walked briskly to a meadow already dotted with those picturesque haystacks the climate of Ireland necessitates ere the crop can be safely gathered into great ricks, where he remained harrying

his labourers and the women, who also were hard at work, till dinner-time approached, when he thoughtfully retraced his steps towards the house.

As he came within sight of an angle formed by the garden hedge, he caught just the flutter of a woman's skirt whisking off as fast as its wearer could hurry away.

Changing his own course and entering the garden, he saw the Ensign apparently engaged in rapt contemplation of a currant-bush, on which the young fry had not left a single berry.

"I am glad to find you are able to walk so far," said the farmer. "I hope you'll not do yourself any injury."

The officer, turning as though he had not heard the sound of Mr. Muir's footsteps, smiled as he answered,

"O no ; I really am getting quite strong again."

"That will be good news for all your friends."

"You are very kind to say so, Mr. Muir. If it had not been for the nursing and hospitality received in your house, my friends would scarcely have heard that good news for many a long day."

Perfectly well the young scamp knew war would shortly be declared by the man who had accorded him shelter and a welcome ; but so long as it suited the farmer to keep his claws hidden, Ensign Ludham determined to take no notice of such things being in existence.

"If you have not been tiring yourself out, maybe you'd have a mind to walk with me as far as the field, after dinner," suggested Mr. Muir.

"Nothing I should like better. Had it not been for your prohibition I should have followed you this morning ; but I really do want to get well and strong. I must not presume on such kindness as I have received here for ever."

Mr. Muir was wary enough not to commit himself to anything which might be construed into a further invitation, but yet he belonged to a people too genuinely hospitable to remain totally silent.

"That's nothing—nothing at all," he said, in a courtly spirit of compromise.

"Nothing!" repeated his guest. "I'd like to know who would have done for a total stranger what you have."

"I'd be very sorry to think any one of the neighbours wouldn't have done as much, at any rate," answered Mr. Muir, feeling he had scored another trick against the English.

"Bell wants to know if she'll put the dinner down again."

It was one of the children who ran across the yard to put this question in all its original force.

"We're coming—we're coming. You see," added Mr. Muir, by way of indirect apology, "she's thinking about the crop. My daughter Bell is a very thrifty young woman."

"I never before had the pleasure of meeting any one more thrifty," said Ensign Ludham. "Admirable in every relation of life."

Mr. Muir did not feel quite satisfied on this latter point, so he wisely held his tongue.

"Won't you draw up your chair?" suggested Miss Muir to the officer as he entered the room, where she was already seated at the head of the festive board. "I hope you can eat boiled beef and greens. Lizzie, just set the Ensign a plate for his skins."

"I assure you, Miss Muir, I have only one," said the irrepressible Ensign; but he did not look across at Carline as he spoke. Since breakfast matters had progressed to a stage in which glances are rather avoided.

"Ay, ay," thought the farmer, on whom no sign, however trivial, was now lost; "it's time you got your marching orders, my boy."

For a few minutes there was little said; scarcely a sound broke the stillness but the clatter of knives and forks, and an occasional request for potatoes. Even Miss Muir, who had some small household care on her mind, refrained from what her father was wont to term "side wipes." She did not fling indirect taunts at the Ensign for preferring water to milk in

any form ; the children having happily been provided with a sufficient meal in the kitchen, it was not possible for her to bid them sit up, or eat properly, or in any other way instruct them in the way they should go ; whilst during the whole of dinner she spoke no word of scorn even to Carline, whose shortcomings usually furnished an interlude whenever conversation flagged, as it had often a knack of doing—not wholly peculiar to Ardilaw.

“ That beef’s not bad, Bell ; I think I could take another cut,” said Mr. Muir, after a silence devoted entirely to the benefit of his inner man ; then, as the red-armed, rough-handed Phyllis called Poll carried his plate round for that second supply of food he felt the case required, he added, as a casual piece of information of no great importance,

“ I’ve got a bit of news for you all. You may look to see Gorman next week. That’s my only son, you know, Ensign—my first-born.”

The bit of news dropped like a shell amongst those present. Miss Muir sat with carving-knife and fork suspended in mid-air ; Sarah and Carline turned and stared at their father in amazement ; Molly nearly let the plate she was holding drop, so great was her astonishment ; while for a moment even Ensign Ludham failed presence of mind to say,

“ I remember ; that is the gentleman you told me had been adopted when quite a child by his uncle.”

“ That’s quite right. His mother’s uncle took him from me when he was only two years of age.”

“ And he has never been in this part of the country since, Ensign,” observed Miss Muir.

“ How glad you will be to see him !” commented the Ensign, with a benignant smile, happy to think there were evil days in store for Bell—days during the course of which his own many grievances would be amply avenged.

CHAPTER V.

"I HAVE been thinking that, as your son is at last returning to his ancestral roof-tree, the sooner I take my departure the better. Charming as no doubt I have made myself, it is, I fear, a melancholy fact that under the circumstances you will find my room even pleasanter than my company."

"It is out of the way considerate of you mentioning such a thing," said Mr. Muir, who had not yet quite made up his mind whether he most desired Ensign Ludham's absence or presence.

Two o'clock had struck, the afternoon sun was as hot as any sun ever can be in Ireland, only two or three pure white clouds flecked the blue expanse of heaven, the green of the meadows had become vivid, a westerly wind caressed the sunburnt cheeks of lowly haymakers; down in the glen a trickling stream flowed slowly to music of its own making; the peaceful stir of country life pervaded the whole landscape, and Mr. Muir and his guest were, according to agreement, sauntering over the grass in order that the former might see "with his own two eyes," to quote Miss Bell, how work was progressing.

No figure less like the typical Arcadian than Mr. Muir's probably ever before crossed the sweet summer fields.

Tall, gaunt, erect, uncompromising, clad in a suit of even-ing black, white linen shirt, black stock, and high hat, he stalked solemnly beside Ensign Ludham, who wore a pair of loose gray trousers, no waistcoat, an old velvet shooting-jacket much the worse for wear, a broad-brimmed straw hat pushed back from his forehead, a turn-down collar fastened with a gold stud, carried a notched and gnarled blackthorn lent him by his host, and halted perceptibly as he struggled onward.

Mr. Muir looked askance at the youth as they walked along. He would not have thought much, or indeed at all, about "the boy" limping, if it had not been for what Bell had said concerning him. Bell's utterances were, as a rule, so eminently disagreeable, she found it quite unnecessary to add to their unpleasantness by falsehood; therefore her friends had not even the satisfaction of believing there might not be a grain of truth in what she said. Miss Muir's conclusions might be open to doubt, but her facts were incontrovertible. If she stated, not that she thought, but that she had seen, a thing, there could be no question on the subject; and Bell, a full week back, declared the Ensign went up-stairs three steps at a time. Mr. Muir had never beheld him doing anything of the sort; but that proved nothing. He was getting to feel "dubious" about the officer's straightforwardness. He had "a pleasant way with him," and he came of "decent people," and his ways were "agreeable," and his manners beyond the common affable; yet still, the farmer thought a great deal as he noticed Ensign Ludham's painful walk, and at last he said,

"I am afraid you're not as strong on that bad leg as we could wish."

"O, it's getting all right," answered the young hypocrite. "I ought not to have stood on it so long this morning, that's all."

"I believe you're correct there," agreed Mr. Muir, in a tone which meant much more than his words.

"At any rate," answered the officer, "I shall be well enough to relieve you of my company very shortly. I should like, if I may, to remain here over Sunday. Then, supposing you could give me a lift as far as Holywood, I'd charter a boat across the Lough—Skirton is at Carrickfergus, in command of our company, and I ought to join him there."

"Carrick's a fine heartsome place," returned the farmer, more perplexed in his mind than ever, now the hour of parting seemed imminent, as to whether he most wished the officer to go or to stay.

"I am very glad indeed to hear you say so, Mr. Muir, for I have always been given to understand the officers' quarters faced the east, which, as we all know, is a peculiarly healthy aspect for delicate people."

"But, Ensign, you're surely not just that delicate yourself?" suggested Mr. Muir anxiously.

"I put the matter generally," observed Mr. Ludham, with a lofty composure; "but if we must descend to particulars, I am *not* strong. When I am at home, my mother is always asking the doctor about my heart and lungs (no interesting disease, as you must be well aware, ever attaches itself to the liver); and that good gentleman makes a point of tapping my chest, as a woodpecker does a tree, and with a like result. He says something about me is hollow."

"Maybe he's not so far out," remarked Mr. Muir.

"And as mine," calmly continued Ensign Ludham, too wise to take any notice of Mr. Muir's nasty sarcasm, "is considered a very valuable life—only five healthy persons intervene between me and a baronetcy—I am tormented to put my feet in hot water, and wear flannels, and beware of damp, and go to bed with the lamb, and lie ever so late in the morning; so, you see, I can't be strong, Mr. Muir, I can't indeed. It is only the enormous care you have taken of me which has preserved its brightest ornament to the Rutlandshire Ragamuffins, as the —th regiment is affectionately nicknamed."

"If you're tired, won't you sit a bit?" inquired Mr. Muir, hospitably pointing to a felled tree lying near a thorn-hedge close at hand. "I'd be vexed if a man that's held of such account came to harm as long as he stops at Ardilaw."

With an appreciative grin, the young fellow stretched himself full length on the trunk, his once injured leg well in evidence, his hat tilted over his eyes—his whole attitude that of utter rest and contentment, presenting a marked contrast to the stiff figure seated bolt upright at his feet.

"As you urge me so strongly, I think I will indulge in a cigar," said the Ensign, putting one lazy hand into his pocket

and drawing out his case. "Can't I tempt you, Mr. Muir? I don't think I have ever seen you smoke."

"No; and I don't think you ever will," returned Mr. Muir. "There was a time—once—when I liked a smoke as well as any man; but I gave it up because a woman could not bear the smell of tobacco, and I've never had pipe or cigar between my lips since."

"Really? How very interesting! I hope I am not indiscreet in concluding you were in love with the lady."

"I was, or you may be sure I wouldn't have given up my will to her pleasure."

"What a touching reminiscence! I wonder whether I shall ever be sufficiently in love to relinquish anything for the sake of my fair."

"It is not over and above likely," answered the farmer, with saturnine enjoyment of his own wit; and there ensued a pause, during the continuance of which the song of the grasshoppers became distinctly audible, and the officer's thoughts went flitting about like the butterflies flashing through the summer air.

"She was my first wife," observed Mr. Muir, at length breaking silence.

"She! Who? Good gracious, what are you talking about?" cried Ensign Ludham. "O, I beg your pardon. I had quite forgotten. You mean, of course, the lady you preferred to tobacco."

"Just that," said Mr. Muir, a little down-heartedly; for he felt himself repulsed, as hard natures often do when they lapse into sentiment.

"You were *very* fond of her?" hazarded the officer, raising himself on his elbow—shallow waters can reflect cloud and sunshine even better than great oceans, which sometimes seem almost to absorb both.

"Ay, and so would you have been if you'd seen her," answered the farmer, grimly in earnest. For once he had scraped the mould out of his dead wife's grave, and raised her

coffin-lid, and looked on the dust therein, while smiling through the years he beheld the fair bright face which had thrilled his youth with rapture. *That*, at least, was not lying under the sod. Though cold, hard, and stern might be the religion he professed, yet the poetry and the passion which underlie all Celtic nature told him, in tones more convincing than any creed, that somewhere, *somewhere*, he would again see that face glorified, all traces of tears wiped away, all sorrow dispelled. Between them—for his Calvinist Pharisaism could not at such a supreme moment blind him to the fact that he was, keeping within the law, as coldly wicked a man as ever drew breath—there might yawn a gulf deep and long as that dividing heaven from hell; nevertheless, he felt with his eyes he should behold her, even from afar, as certainly as at that moment memory gave him back a glimpse of dark laughing eyes and red pouting lips, and cheeks the southern sun seemed to have been kissing, and wavy hair, with little more than the suspicion of a curl about it, and a heart—O God! what had that heart not been ere it broke, and in breaking made no sign!

“It is a most fortunate thing I never did know her.” Thus Ensign Ludham all unwittingly dispelled the vision Mr. Muir had conjured up out of the depths of thirty years spent in sin and hard work. “Of course I should at once have fallen over head and ears in love—a feeling you will understand she must immediately have reciprocated; and there never lived a man less desirous of disturbing conjugal peace than myself. On the whole, Heaven knows what is best for us, Mr. Muir.”

“You’ve a light way of talking. I wonder if it covers a depth of evil-doing?”

“You need not wonder. There never was so childlike and innocent a young fellow as myself. Bless you, I know nothing concerning the sins of this wicked old world. An idyllic life is the life for me. I could make myself happy at Ardilaw for ever—doing nothing useful, of course. Do tell me all about your first wife, your love’s young dream, if talking on the subject will not distress you.”

Ensign Ludham bit the end off his cigar, lit a match, placed himself in a more comfortable position, while Mr. Muir sat with bowed head, hands loosely clasped, wrestling hard with thought and memory. For any one who knew something of humanity, it must have been apparent that between the two men there stretched centuries of civilisation. There sat a savage—reluctantly conforming to law, influenced by a vague religion. Stretched at his ease, full length, upon a fallen tree, lay a reprobate, out of whom modern scepticism and social culture had crushed every spark of manhood save superficial courtesy and physical courage.

The first scarcely understood the full meaning of social restraint, the second had outstepped its boundaries. He was as dangerous an inmate as a man possessed of a pretty daughter could have desired within his doors, as cool a hand, as thorough-paced a blackguard as ever, when the hour came for mere brute daring to assert itself, rode cheerily through the Valley of Death to spike an enemy's guns, or marched on bravely to the front, knowing full well that every bullet has its billet.

"I'd like well to tell you some little about myself, if it wouldn't tire you over-much," said Mr. Muir, in a low hushed voice, as if he were talking in a church.

"Should be only too charmed," murmured his guest, turning himself indolently, so as the better to catch such words of wisdom as might on that summer's afternoon be wandering about Ardilaw.

"My father and my grandfather before him were bailiffs on the Manor of Clonmellin, in the service of the Gorman family—that you may never have heard tell of?"

"Frequently," murmured the officer, who till that hour was unaware such a place as Clonmellin existed.

"The Gormans had a grand domain. I don't say it brought in much money—for it was mostly seashore and mountain, all but the made land about the house—but you could walk and ride for hours, days almost, over their property. There were parts where a sheep would have starved—but the wild fowl

fattened. I've myself killed, on a cold, quiet night, thirty wild duck. Lord ! what was there in the way of game you might not have found on those hills !"

"You never by chance met with a lion or a tiger when you were prowling about poaching?" suggested Ensign Ludham.

"I never did ; but if I had I wouldn't have been afraid," said Mr. Muir. "No more afraid than to answer to the charge of 'poaching' in any of your English courts. We had leave to shoot what we liked ; if we hadn't, my father would have shot me for bringing home what I did. He was a faithful servant. He wouldn't have wronged his master of an ear of corn. The agent for the property lived in Dublin, and came down twice a year to see how things were going on ; but my father was really the managing and capable man ; he had all things under his hand—money, and stock and crop, and land."

"And all this time, may one inquire what the Gorman of Clonmellin was about? Was he quite content to leave everything under your father's hand, and ask no inconvenient or unseasonable questions?"

"Yes, quite content," said Mr. Muir, with conviction. "Where there's no fraud, a master has no need to ask questions. My great-grandfather was Scotch, and they hanged him on a tree in front of his own house because, being a Covenanter, he wouldn't go against his convictions."

"What a plucky old gentleman !" commented the Ensign.

"He was that ; my father used to sit by the hour and tell me stories about him—stories he had heard from his father, you understand."

"All of which, perhaps, one day soon you will tell me, Mr. Muir ; just at present I am dying to hear something of your wife."

"I am coming to her, but you do just as well to whip me on a bit. I'll tell you what the country-side called her—Miss Katty Gorman—bonny, bright, beautiful Katty Gorman."

"Really ! and you were glad, no doubt, to marry her, spite of the bar sinister."

"What do you mean? Do you think she wasn't the man's daughter?"

"Pray, don't be so vehement, Mr. Muir. I intended no offence. I had no doubt of the fair Katty being Mr. Gorman's child; but—" And the Ensign's pause suggested more than any words he could have spoken.

Up into the farmer's face surged a dull and passionate red, which for a moment tinged forehead and cheeks with a wholly foreign colour. For a moment he felt as though some one had slapped him with an open hand—the suggestion, though false, affected him more painfully than the keenest truth could have done, since it seemed to imply so certainly no one who belonged of right to decent people could possibly have mated with himself. Just for a moment he hesitated, then—

"You are out this time, Ensign," he said, not without a certain triumph. "My wife was Mr. Terence Gorman's eldest child, born in lawful wedlock, and her mother as grand and high a lady as your own. There was nothing wanting on *her* side, and if her people had only given me the ghost of a chance, I'll swear they would have found nothing wanting on *mine*."

"The Gormans were blind, then, Mr. Muir, to your manifold excellences, inherited and otherwise," said the officer, taking the cigar out of his mouth, and again raising himself on one elbow, the better to contemplate at his leisure a man detested at Clonmellin.

"They couldn't read me as I was, more's the pity," explained the farmer. "They were looking for thoughts and notions that had no place in me."

"Without wishing for a moment to side with these unappreciative Gormans, might I inquire how you managed to secure the eldest daughter of such a house? Of course the fact of having had a great-grandfather who was hung would score immensely in your favour; but descent isn't everything. As a rule, rich folk have a detestable way of asking the length of your purse. Am I wrong, Mr. Muir, in imagining you were, in your first youth, not exactly a millionaire?"

"I had not much money, but I had something else. You might not think it to look at me now, Ensign; but when I wanted a few years of being your age all the women were running after me. Now, that's a statement might astonish you."

"Quite the contrary; it only proves what I have always thought, that the dear creatures possess an instinct as true as rapid."

"I'm well aware," proceeded Mr. Muir, "that no one could call me exactly handsome at this present time—"

"I don't want to make you blush; so I will only say you are greatly mistaken," said the Ensign, without a change of countenance.

"I know I am not," maintained the farmer stoutly; "but that was all different once. I had a notion of setting myself off, too. I mostly carried a flower in my button-hole; and—"

"Excuse my interrupting you; but did the proposal come from Miss Gorman?"

"No; that it didn't. I wouldn't say but she met me half-way. She was a free, innocent sort of girl—had not a thought of harm. I could not just tell you now how it all began; but I know how it ended. We made a match of it; and you may be very sure that day I thought my fortune was made."

"And had none of the lady's friends a suspicion of what was going on?"

"Not a suspicion. She had not a friend near at hand but an old aunt of her father's, half blind and whole doting. Her mother was dead; Mr. Gorman was married the second time to a daughter of Lord Dunfelde, and the pair lived in London, making the first wife's money spin. Ay, you might say there was not an egg laid on Clonmellin manor, or a pat of butter printed, but the price of it went across the Channel. Why, Mr. Gorman hadn't been in Ireland for years till he came back to turn my wife out of doors."

"I see—and so your fortune was not made, Mr. Muir."

"Faith, no. I got something in my hand, but not much—and my father lost his situation, which was a crying shame, for

the man knew no more of what had happened than his employer. And they behaved cruelly to my wife—cruelly. They broke her heart ; she only lived three months after her child was born—that's Gorman, you know."

"He was brought up by some relation, was he not?"

"Yes, by his mother's uncle, Mr. Trevasson, of Mount Michael, county Kilkenny. The Trevassons were originally Cornish folk. I've never set eyes on the lad since he was two years of age, and now he must be getting on for eight-and-twenty."

"What does he do?"

"He does not do anything but amuse himself. He wanted to be an officer like yourself, but the old man wouldn't hear of it."

"O!" said Ensign Ludham. "What a pleasure it will be to him to make acquaintance with his family!"

"I'm not so sure of that," answered the farmer; "you see our way of living is scarcely such as he has been used to, and I could have wished—"

"If he is of my mind, you need wish no greater happiness for him than a month at Ardilaw," said the young man politely.

"I feel obliged to you. If you think you are rested, perhaps we might move on."

They "moved on" over the newly-mown field—the Ensign carrying his hat in his hand and still limping painfully; the farmer warning him not to step into any drain, and to beware of worm-casts.

What with the haymakers, the carts, the horses, the dogs, and the children, that hill field presented a most picturesque appearance.

"I'd like to sketch this," said the officer.

"Well, what would hinder you? Lizzie 'll run in and bring anything you need."

"Thank you greatly. Here, Lizzie, I want the drawing-book you'll find on my table, and a couple of pencils, and—but whom have we here, Mr. Muir? By Jove, what a horse!"

Turning, Mr. Muir looked down the field, and saw, entering by the "gap" made for the carts to pass through, a man and horse. The horse was jet black; except for the star on its forehead the creature had not a white hair about it. The man dismounted, and, passing his arm through the bridle, came straight on towards the haymakers.

"This is likely some friend of yours, Ensign," suggested the farmer.

"He is no friend of mine, I think. He is a fine-looking fellow, though, let him be who he may. Let us go to meet him."

When the stranger got close to them he stopped, and said a little doubtfully, "Is Mr. Muir here?"

"My name is Muir," answered the farmer. There was the slightest perceptible pause—then,

"You do not know me?"

"Well, I can't say that I do. Surely you're not—"

"I am Gorman Muir," was the answer; and father and son shook hands.

CHAPTER VI.

"IT is a bad job," said Mr. Muir; "a very bad job."

"It is so bad it could not well be worse," answered his son.

The quiet night had stolen softly on, gradually enfolding in its dusky mantle the azures and the gold light of a perfect summer's day. A tender silence, broken only by the ripple of the river, the rustling of the leaves, or the scurry of a rabbit, brooded over Ardilaw. Late and hard the haymakers had worked, but they lay now asleep at home; the children, whose holiday was drawing to an end, were all abed. The Misses Muir had retired to rest; the kitchen fire had long been "slacked," ready in a few hours to be once again blown up into a flame with the help of a pair of wheezy bellows; the servant-of-all-work was sleeping the sleep of utter weariness, the soiled and dog-eared dream-book, conned by the light of a guttering dip before she lay down, still clutched in one red unlovely hand, that yet was not without its pathos; eleven o'clock P.M. had come and passed, and still Mr. Muir and his son sate in the parlour—once upon a time my lady's dining-room—talking earnestly.

Ensign Ludham was gone. "Chains and fetters," as Miss Muir poetically remarked at a subsequent period, "couldn't have kept him after he set eyes on Gorman." Go he would; and, spite of all persuasion, go he did. Old Ned, the blind horse, that could well-nigh have counted years with Miss Bell, had, after a long day's work in the hay-field, been "shoved" into the gig, so that the officer and his fortunes might be jogged comfortably to the railway station. He had declined the pleasure of Mr. Muir's company on the ground that he

could not think of taking him away from his son ; and he negatived the son's offer of "tooling him" because that gentleman must "be so overjoyed to meet his father."

Bag, if not baggage, the Ensign was gone. Laughingly he had tossed Bell's last taunt back to that charming maiden ; he had distributed largesse all round ; found time and opportunity to whisper a word in Carline's ear ; he had once more expressed his obligations to Mr. Muir, and accepted Gorman's help into the gig ; then, accompanied to the gate by the children, who all "tore down" the avenue like "mad things" to unfasten and click the latch, he departed from Ardilaw.

And now another person sat in Ensign Ludham's accustomed chair, and stared out through the windows, destitute of blind or curtain, into the semi-darkness of the summer's night.

Any person looking into the room would, by the light of an oil lamp suspended from the ceiling, have seen a strange interior. On the centre of an oaken floor, off which the passage of heavy boots had scraped well-nigh all the polish, was spread a small square of worn and faded carpet. The panelled walls were destitute of ornament of any kind, sort, or description. Above the chimneypiece, which was of Sienna marble, a richly-carved over-mantel rose to the cornice. Into this a few nails had been driven, and these supported, as on a rack, a cane and couple of riding-whips, and the blade of a sword-fish. On the mantelshelf stood a couple of valuable old china basins, used as receptacles for bills, letters, receipts, screws of tobacco, broken pipes, and odds and ends of string ; to a hook just above hung suspended the "tawse," by means of which Mr. Muir had driven his progeny along the way they should go. On a chiffonier, placed in a recess beside the fireplace, were ranged a few old books, the family Bible, and a workbox which belonged to Mr. Muir's mother. The rest of the furniture consisted of one of those dining-tables of which the flaps can be dropped down at pleasure, the legs under all circumstances constituting themselves a distinct nuisance, an ancient sofa, originally upholstered in shiny horsehair like the fourteen

uneasy chairs that formed the suite, but which Bell's industrious fingers had re-covered with sundry breadths taken out of the many "good" dresses left behind by her mother when that sainted woman departed this wicked world.

In one of the uncomfortable armchairs belonging to the "horsehair and solid mahogany suite" sat Mr. Muir, a glass of punch smoking at his elbow, perplexity engraven in the clearest letters on every line and wrinkle of his face. Opposite to him, in another armchair of the same recondite and mysterious build, the younger man lay nearly at full length, his legs stretched out, his feet crossed, his head resting on the sharp edge of the back rail of the chair, a tumbler of whisky and cold water standing, scarcely touched, at his elbow; a half-smoked cigar held between the finger and thumb of his right hand; his whole weary attitude that of a man thoroughly permeated with his conviction that "the job" to which his father had referred was indeed one difficult to make worse.

"What could have possessed the man?" said Mr. Muir, in continuance of the conversation.

"A woman," was his son's pithy explanation.

"And at his time of life, too! Dear, O dear!"

"The older a man the more likely he is to make a fool of himself."

"Couldn't you have stopped the match by any manner of honest means?"

"Not unless I had married her myself."

"And why didn't you? Man alive, why didn't you?"

"For one reason, because I should not have been any better off. A single pauper does not cost so much to keep as two."

"That's true enough. I had forgotten everything except how you might have kept your uncle from committing such wickedness."

"And, besides," continued Mr. Gorman Muir, putting his dead cigar in his mouth and puffing as though it had been alight, "I hate her!"

"Do you, though? That is bad. The Scriptures say we ought to hate no man, and I suppose that means we ought to hate no woman either."

"I don't know what the Scriptures say—and I don't much care. It is human nature to hate what is hateful, and Mrs. Trevasson is detestable."

"My word, not even handsome, then?"

"I did not say she was not handsome. She is. So were Delilah and Jezebel, and a whole host more of delightful ladies of that type, unless the painters have played us very false indeed. For my own part, however, I do not like Delilahs or Jezebels, or, for that matter, Judiths either, even at a distance; and when we come to close quarters I hate them;" and, as if it had been one of the historical dames in question, Mr. Gorman Muir flung his half-finished cigar under the grate in a rage.

Though he did not smoke, Mr. Muir, ere seeking the solitude of his own chamber, recovered the fag-end of that cigar, observing to himself as he carefully wiped it clear of soot and dust, "He must have been accustomed to awful waste."

"Wasn't there any way you could have made friends with Mrs. Trevasson, so that you still might have got the run of your teeth and kept a roof over your head at Mount Michael?"

Mr. Muir junior threw up his arms, put his hands under his head, stretched himself out a little longer, and laughed a laugh which had in it more of anger than of amusement.

"Couldn't you?" repeated his father earnestly. "Though I was not so bad-looking once, I never in my best days had the advantages you possess. You are well put together, 'suple,' strongly knit, far-and-away from ill-favoured, smooth in your speech, and as fit to talk to any lady as the Ensign himself. What would have hindered your pleasing your uncle's young wife? When I was your age, I'd like to have seen the woman I couldn't cajole."

"Give me twelve hours," quoted Mr. Gorman Muir, "'and I'll distance the handsomest man in England.'"

"Then why in the name of fortune didn't you make the new mistress (bad luck to her!) that fond of you she wouldn't let your uncle part his nephew?" said Mr. Muir, speaking in that series of ellipses of which the Irish are so fond.

"If you must know, the new mistress, as you call her, was too fond of me already."

"Ho, ho!" ejaculated Mr. Muir; "I deemed you were keeping some cat snug in a bag. I thought to myself, from the first, there's more yet he's not telling me."

"I shouldn't have told you now," retorted his son, "only I want you to understand clearly there is no good in thinking matters can ever be made up with my uncle."

"I am not so sure I just understand the whole business yet," answered Mr. Muir, whose strongest point was obstinate antagonism. "How did the old man come to the rights of the affair?"

"He has not come to the rights of the affair. He never will come to the rights of the affair."

"Lord, man! you're worse nor Samson and his honey in the lion's carcase. Can't you speak out, and say in so many plain words what you mean?"

"I mean, in plain words, that Dora Autrim was in love with me."

"You needn't raise your voice that way here; I am not deaf," said Mr. Muir. "In love with you, and then—"

"Finding I would have nothing to do with her, she got hold of my uncle—"

"She was no fool. Better be an old man's darling, you mind, than—"

"And to cut a long story short, they were married."

"Well?"

"They had not been back a week before I found out that she cared for me still."

"Surely, then, you might have had things pretty much your own way?"

"I never pretended to be a saint," said Mr. Gorman Muir, "but I am not a villain."

"Aren't you, now?" retorted Mr. Muir; "but, of course, you know best."

"I know that, at any rate."

"And so I suppose you went to your uncle, and made a clean breast of it."

"I did no such thing. The secret was not mine to tell; and if it had been, I should not have told upon a woman. Further, the story could not have done me any good. His mind was so warped against me he could not have believed me right in saying black was black."

"My own opinion is, you have bungled the whole business. Couldn't you have spoken the woman fair, and kept in with her a bit till your own turn was served?"

"I tell you I am not a villain, though my poor uncle thinks me one. I told her the same county could not contain both of us, and that I would go; and I was just trying to get some assurance from her husband as to some future help from him, when she took the wind out of my sails by making the vilest accusations against me."

"Ay, ay; the old case of Joseph and his mistress over again, no doubt," said Mr. Muir, nodding sapiently.

"She did not go so far as Mrs. Potiphar," answered his son, an evil light flashing from his dark-brown eyes; "but she went far enough. She declared she would have her revenge upon me, and she has got it now."

"I can't say Joseph was a young man I ever particularly took to myself," observed Mr. Muir. "There seemed to me a great deal of foolishness about him."

"Probably you would not have acted as he did."

"I'm very sure I would not go to gaol if by whiles flattering of any woman I could keep out of it."

"Then there we join issue," retorted Gorman.

"Well, see what your precipitancy has done for you!"

"Sent me adrift with fifty pounds certain in hand and a thousand pounds possibly ahead."

"And what you're to do, I'm sure I don't know."

"Neither do I; but I mean to think. May I stay here for awhile till I have thought?"

"Where would you stop but in your father's house?" returned Mr. Muir. "You're heartily welcome to all I can give you, and though I don't set myself up to be anything beyond the common, I have managed to save enough to keep me and mine out of the workhouse. There's no call for you to starve while you are here; and now that I know the worst, I think we may as well be thinking of going to bed. I'll show you the room where Bell has had fresh sheets laid for you, and fine and sweet you'll find them. Things are scarce so straight as they might be if the Ensign had not left in such hot haste, leaving most of his property lying loose behind him. I wished he had stopped a day or two longer, so that you might have got acquainted. Of all the easy, careless, happy-go-lucky young fellows I ever met, he is the chief. Just look at the silver fittings out of his dressing-case lying loose without a lock turned on them. Good-night! I hope you'll have a sound rest."

"I have no doubt of that, for I am very tired. Good-night!" And then Gorman Muir, standing in the very middle of the room, sighed heavily.

All around him were carelessly strewed outward signs of the rank he was leaving, while, short as had been his experience of Ardilaw, he understood pretty well the sort of thing he must expect to meet. Utterly weary, utterly wretched, utterly disheartened, he undressed as rapidly as possible, and, flinging himself into Miss Bell's snow-white and lavender-scented linen, soon forgot his troubles in a deep and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

“WELL, this is a place!” It was Mrs. Boyle who spoke, and she had for audience only that insignificant person, her daughter. “Little feeling as your father ever had for anybody but himself, I think if he knew his widow was exiled like that girl Elizabeth I read about once, to such a Siberia as Clear Stream Cottage, even he would rise up from his grave and try to do justice by a woman who did her duty by him only too well. Early and late I’m sure I was at him to mend his ways.”

Berna made no answer while her mother fired this volley over her head; she was unpacking a box, and she did not look up, lest some bullet in mid-career should pierce her brain.

Further, if there were a girl who had learned, in the bitterest school of experience human beings can attend, the beauty of silence and the foolishness of speech, that girl was Berna Boyle.

“Some women might not mind it,” continued the widow. “Now there’s that Miss Craig we saw at the Whitefords’. I’ll be bound she’d consider herself made if anybody said he’d pay the rent of a house like this for her, let alone offer to put a few things in the rooms to make them habitable; but then she never knew the meaning of a different sort of life. By what I can understand, she and her old father—he was some sort of a minister near Derry—never saw anybody but poor fisher people, year out, year in; never went about the world, nor put themselves in the way of getting into good society. You might tell by her manners she had never been further than three miles from home.”

“I thought her rather a nice person—homely, but quiet.”

"O, she's quiet enough, I grant you, and that's the very reason what would content her wouldn't content me. She knows no better than to sit sewing or knitting the live-long day, without a soul to speak to, or a thing to see. Since I have been standing here, Berna, I have not beheld man, woman, or child passing along the lane but an old fellow driving a donkey-cart."

"But the place is so sweet, mamma," pleaded the girl. "Of its size, I never saw so pretty a cottage."

"I have nothing so much to say against it, if it wasn't, in a manner of speaking, on the coast of Africa. There's not a creature to pass even the time of day to. Then, the rooms are that small you might reach a book off the opposite wall while you're sitting with your feet on the fender. What we're to do here in the winter, alone with ourselves and old Ruth, goodness only knows, for I don't. And to tell me I'm not to be going to Belfast or calling at Richard Vince's office! It's a crying shame, and I don't care who hears me! It's a crying shame—just as if I had some disease on me like leprosy, only worse, or the mark of Cain stamped deep in my forehead. If I'd committed a murder, I couldn't have been worse treated. What have I done? O, what have I done, to be sent down to a place where there's not even a scullery to the kitchen, nor a bit of grass where we could feed a cow? (Milk itself does give a feeling of plenty about a house.) If we got one, and tethered her on the slope there—the grazing would not last her a day, and she'd be slipping into the stream and breaking her leg, maybe. What's that you say? Don't I think you had better try to tidy up the room a little? Why, of course I do. If I wasn't so tired, I can hardly drag myself along the passage, I'd have turned to myself and made it fit for anybody to come into; not, goodness knows, that there's much use making anything look well here. Nobody will ever come to such an out-of-the-way hole."

"For our own pleasure, mamma, we may as well have things as comfortable as possible."

"Ah! and indeed it's little pleasure or comfort we need ever look for here. If only I had felt that I dare trust you with that money, we wouldn't have been here as we are this minute. I shall always say it was Richard Vince's wife brought bad luck for us in her hand that day. I wonder if I'll ever forget the shock I got. Why, an infant in arms might have knocked me down."

"Don't think of it," entreated Berna; "and really Mrs. Vince has been most kind."

"O yes, you're sure to say that, taking part against your own mother! You'll be telling me next, I suppose, the woman is handsome. Why, she's as dark as a negro; how could she miss being, when her own grandmother was a black? That was the one brought the great fortune into the Carpenter family Theoph spent in sinful extravagance—driving four-in-hands and giving dinner-parties where you might have swum in the wine. Well, well; wilful waste, you know—not that the saying came true with me, for a more careful, saving woman never married herself to sorrow and poverty. What in all the wide world do you see out there?—staring as if your great eyes were starting out of your head! My gracious goodness, girl! lay down that duster, and be off and see if you can't make yourself look a bit decent; and look here, Berna, tell Ruth to slip on a clean cap and a white apron before she opens the gate to Mrs. Vince. Who, in the name of wonder, would have thought of her coming down? I wish she had stayed away. No less than a pair would content her, either;" and so Mrs. Boyle murmured on to space, for Berna had vanished.

Fortune favours the brave. Mrs. Vince could on occasion be very brave, and the fickle goddess rewarded her.

Early on the morning following Mr. Vince's ignominious defeat, she ordered round her brougham and, dressed in rich though plain apparel, drove straight to Cunningham's Hotel. Spite of Mrs. Boyle's verdict, Mrs. Vince was a very handsome woman. Unlike the widow's, her beauty had not faded with

the years—quite the contrary; the tints of a somewhat ungenial summer mellowed under a gracious sun of late prosperity into the rich hues of a glorious autumn. She was large, tall, commanding of aspect, dark—though not in the way Mrs. Boyle implied—with blue-black hair coiled into great masses at the back of her head, straight black brows, eyes of the truest, deepest violet, a decided nose, a wide mouth which could expand into a frank, pleasant smile, firm chin, head well poised on a round, shapely throat—a woman who looked best in sweeping velvets and trailing silks, wrapped up in costly furs, or gathering rich laces round her portly figure.

Armed for conquest, she found no one to conquer—no one but poor Berna, who had been left at home by her mother to see the luggage was not meddled with, and also perhaps by fate in order that Mrs. Vince might see what sort of stuff the girl was made of.

Though young, Berna had served her time in the social workshop, and knew who was who and what was what.

As a kindred spirit, Mrs. Vince surveyed her with astonishment.

“Great heavens!” she thought. “Here is a creature out of whom one might evolve anything—anything. God grant some of my own children may attain to her stature.”

True, the girl was timid; but as her shyness proceeded from no lack of breeding, but rather from the misery caused by that constant blister her mother never would allow to close, there were minutes when nature asserted itself, and the true Berna—who had been so loved by the lonely old lady living in desolate state near Cheltenham, and who had ridden beside her father into the wild fastnesses of Mayo—peeped through the barred windows of the prison-house to which she was, by her own loyal choice, consigned.

For many a weary day, spent in battling with her young vehement grief and listening to her mother’s senseless complaints and maundering conversation, she had not spoken to any woman of her own rank in life.

From Mrs. Boyle, as from a plague, even the kindest and most tolerant of her own sex, if well-bred, fled appalled. Sympathy withered in her presence ; charity wide enough to consort with sinners, and carry sweet words of hope and help into dark dens of wickedness, could not pardon the faults thrust as virtues in its face.

There was pity for Berna—but “society” felt that daughter could not be dissociated from mother, more especially in a case where the daughter, turning her back on the Boyles, elected to cast her lot “with that horrible woman.”

“Despite her external refinement, there must be a great vein of commonness in the girl, or she never could continue to live with Mrs. Boyle :” so argued the world.

Even before Mr. Boyle’s death this was said, and after that accident, which left Berna fatherless, the words were spoken more frequently and with greater emphasis.

“My dear,” exclaimed Mrs. Vince, after they had talked on many subjects, “we must be friends. Come and stay at Craigvallen for a time, and let us get thoroughly acquainted.”

Then, in a moment, a black, gloomy cloud swept the tender sunshine off Berna’s face.

“Thank you,” she murmured ; “you are very kind ; but I do not think—” and as their eyes met she stopped suddenly, while a torrent of painful colour dyed her shamed cheeks and forehead.

For once Mrs. Vince proved unequal to the occasion. She had forgotten—as nearly as possible she had walked into a pitfall of her own digging ; but for Berna, she could scarcely have escaped the peril. As it was, the danger had been too imminent for her instantly to regain self-possession, and she was just considering what kind word she could say that might enable her to back gracefully out of the dilemma, when the door opened, and Mrs. Boyle appeared. Mrs. Boyle, flushed, excited, exhausted, yet still with a certain glow of victory about her whole person, which indicated a belief on her part that she had not again traversed the scenes of her early victories “for

nothing." Towards Mrs. Vince her manner was defiant, while familiar.

"I hope you haven't been waiting long," she began, after she had coldly received Mrs. Vince's first friendly advances, and, as she afterwards remarked to her daughter, taught that lady "to keep back a bit." "Berna's not much of a one to talk. As the morning turned out fine, I thought I'd let some of my friends know I had come back again."

"It must be a considerable time since you saw any of them," said Mrs. Vince politely, merely by way of saying something.

"That's true enough; but time wouldn't make any difference to my friends; friends aren't like relations, you know, ready to turn the cold shoulder the minute they get up in the world. Not but what some of the people I was acquainted with when I was a girl have got on as well as they could desire. There's the Pirns, now," added the widow, turning to Berna, as though that young person had been acquainted from childhood with the celebrated family thus suddenly introduced on the carpet; "Miss Sheill tells me they have got that rich they scarcely know what to do with their money. The uncle has built himself a house fit for any nobleman at Holywood, and they are all living together there till Mr. Pirn gets possession of the estate of Doch-na-Beg, that belonged to the great Dublin barrister Shane Ross. Many a time I've heard my father talk of him, and the way he could turn any witness inside out in less than five minutes. Mr. Pirn has paid for the place long enough ago, but there's an end of a lease or something to run out before he can get possession."

"Doch-na-Beg commands a beautiful view of the Lough," said Mrs. Vince, seeing Berna was temporarily stricken dumb.

"You need not tell me that," answered Mrs. Boyle. "William Pirn's the man to have everything of the best. That was always his way; and no blame to him either, if he could afford it! I did not see anybody but Miss Sheill, though, Berna. The Whitefords are down at the shore, old Mr. Campbell is

not expected to live, and the Dowies have fever in the house. Matilda Sheill wouldn't have been in town herself only she's got a cough you'd be frightened to hear, and is forced to stop in her own room. She *was* glad to see me. She couldn't believe her ears when the servant told her Mrs. Boyle was below. 'Why,' she said, 'you don't look a day older! If it wasn't for the weeds you've on, I'd think you were Milly Vince I had such fine goings-on with at Ballyclare stepped in to see me!' I did not tell her I could not return the compliment. It is astonishing how she has altered. She is not so many years older than me, yet she looks quite a middle-aged woman."

Mrs. Vince felt she could not smile, even mentally, her pity for Berna was so intense.

"But she has lost none of her merry ways," proceeded Mrs. Boyle, who believed she was planting daggers in the heart of Richard's "grand wife" by directing her conversation to Ulick Boyle's daughter; "she's just as heartsome as ever; to have heard us, you'd have thought we weren't more than twelve years old; it was 'Do you mind this?' and 'Have you forgotten that?' We were in fits of laughing all the time, and 'Tilda not able to speak, almost, for the coughing; all her lament was she couldn't help me look for lodgings. O, such a hunt as I've had since I left her—up one street and down another—and the price they ask for the smallest room would eat up our whole income! Never did I come across such a set of harpies—one worse nor another. They all took me for English by my accent; and, indeed, I told one of them, after the extortion I had listened to, I felt ashamed to call myself Irish. Everything extra, for all the world like England, only dirtier. I heard, though, on my way home, of some decent lodgings in the Ormeau Road, that I'd have gone to see, only I felt my knees giving under me. I was told of them by a crossing-sweeper in Arthur Street, who minded my father well. I asked him"—but what Mrs. Boyle asked, or the gentleman who "minded" her father answered, will never be known on this side heaven, for just at that point the widow suddenly paused;

thrust her hand in her pocket ; turned first red, then white ; and finally, as she afterwards told Miss Sheill, " Let a screech out of her you might have heard up at the New Gaol," which caused Mrs. Vince to start to her feet with more celerity than she had ever before displayed.

" We're done for now, Berna ; we're done for now," cried Mrs. Boyle, in a hysterical falsetto. " I'm a lost and ruined woman ;" after vouchsafing which lucid explanation she would have rushed down-stairs and into the street had Mrs. Vince not seized her by the shoulder.

" What on earth is the matter ?" inquired that lady, almost breathless with surprise and terror.

" It's a matter of two hundred and seventy-eight pounds," screamed Mrs. Boyle, as furiously as if " Richard's wife " had been the thief. " Let me go, I bid you. Why do you hinder me, and my good money lying there out in the street ? Let me go, woman. Don't you hear me ?" and striking Mrs. Vince's hand a smart blow with her clenched fist, the widow released herself ; and, crape strings, which she had unfastened, streaming loose, and shawl falling from her shoulders, fled madly from the room.

" Stay where you are," said Mrs. Vince to Berna, as the girl was about to follow ; " you can do no good. She must be at the end of Donegall Street by this time." And then, for the second time, the pair looked straight each in the other's eyes.

Suddenly Berna's steady glance wavered, drooped, fell ; for a moment she seemed as if struggling with some cruel pain.

" Sit down, dear," entreated Mrs. Vince, tenderly touching her breast, " and if you want to cry, cry—don't mind me ;" and, walking to the window, she turned her head away from Mrs. Boyle's daughter, and appeared to be looking out upon the street.

But Berna did not want to cry. The fox she carried within her bosom gnawed too fiercely and constantly for tears. To this girl was denied the poor solace even of sympathy, which

she had no choice but to thrust aside. All she asked from her fellows was leave to hide the wounds, long and wide, of which that proud and sensitive heart bore the scars through life. Could she have wept and made lament, and confided her trouble to any woman, it had not been the keen dagger she felt piercing her very soul, cutting through each quivering nerve, and stabbing in its most vital part every instinct her birth and training had taught her to respect.

Out of such warp and woof as went to compose her character great women have been made; and Mrs. Vince, who felt she might, but for circumstances over which she had no control, have been a great woman too, admired Berna, when with quiet step she crossed the carpet and said,

“If you do not mind, I think I had better put on my bonnet and see whether I cannot be of some use to mamma.”

With that splendid decision which ladies in possession of a handsome income, whose rank is beyond dispute, can on occasion exhibit to some purpose, Mrs. Vince flashed round on the girl, whose only weak point was a finer and more delicate mental organisation than her own.

“You do not know where your mother is,” she said; “and if you did, you would not be of any use. What could have induced her to carry such a sum of money about with her?”

“She never mentioned to me she had any money.”

“Where do you suppose she got it?”

“I have not an idea,” answered Berna, “unless Sir Herbert—” and she flushed crimson.

“I see—I see,” commented Mrs. Vince; and she thought for a moment ere adding, “I came here to-day, Berna—I may call you Berna, may I not, child?—to talk over matters and decide what had better be done. It is an utter impossibility you and your mother can live on sixty pounds a year.”

“O, if mamma would only let me go out as a governess or companion!” gasped the girl. “Could you induce her, do you think, Mrs. Vince? You do seem so clever and strong, she might listen to you. I should scarcely care what I did,

and I really have been pretty well educated. I can play and sing, and draw and dance, and talk French; and I am able to ride and drive."

"The two latter accomplishments not of much use to a governess, I am afraid," remarked Mrs. Vince, with a smile which hid tears she would not let fill her eyes.

"They might be to a companion, though," urged Berna. "Dear Mrs. Vince, if you only—only could induce mamma to let me try, I believe I could make money, and I should only want a little out of my salary for dress; and she might live with some of those friends she talks about. We could be together in the holidays, and I really do not think she would miss me very much."

"Why won't she let you be a governess?" asked Mrs. Vince.

"Because she is afraid it would offend my grandmother, or my great-grandmother, rather. Mamma does so keep on harping about Mrs. Boyle leaving me money; and she won't. She told me herself she had made her will, leaving everything to Sir Herbert; and quite right too," added Berna, with a quite involuntary uplifting of her head. "The money should go with the land."

Mrs. Vince laughed. "From the depths of a bitter experience," she answered, "I can assure you I do not think you will be left anything. All the land and all the money and all the power are sure to be in the hand of a single individual. And now, as I fancy I understand the position pretty clearly, I shall go. Do not let anything tempt you to go in search of your mother. She will return safe and sound. Tell her, if you please, I mean to call quite early to-morrow. Now, good-bye, Berna, and—"

She clasped her arms round the girl's neck, and stood silent.

"And—" questioned Berna, with dumb lips and eloquent eyes rather than with sound.

"Always remember that while I live you have a friend in

Marcella Vince. Good-bye now, good-bye ! Kiss me, dear. God bless you !” and Mrs. Vince strained Berna to her heart ; and then, with veil drawn close, passed down the staircase to her carriage, the door of which an obsequious waiter stood ready to open.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT morning Mrs. Vince, armed with great powers, once more alighted at the door of Cunningham's Hotel.

She was received with almost royal honours. Cunningham's felt it a fine feather in its cap to see the wife of Richard Charles Vince, Esq., step across its threshold. Mrs. Vince, as the daughter of that sinful Theoph Carpenter honourably mentioned by Berna's mother, was in her own right a "person," but when she came to lack a five-pound note that fact would not long have availed her. After her marriage, however, Belfast liked to remember she had been "born in the purple."

She reflected a certain glory on business ; and the money made out of business conferred a very necessary additional charm on the lady. There were daughters of other dilapidated old families living on narrow incomes, in what they considered stately poverty, who wondered how Marcella could have stooped so low. But then Mr. Vince had not asked them to preside over his establishment. In such case they might have been persuaded to stoop too. When the picking up of money is in question some people are not unwilling to stoop very low indeed.

At any rate, Mrs. Vince was even more universally respected than her husband. She had raised Richard Charles stated his admirers, into the sphere for which he was "intended by nature."

"Nature indulges in some queer vagaries," said the malcontents who did not believe in this righteous man. She gave great balls ; she patronised concerts, and always presided over a stall when a fashionable bazaar was on the *tapis*. She did not buy her dresses in London or Paris, or even Dublin, but gladdened the hearts of the Belfast shopkeepers and milliners.

She was kind to the poor ; she kept Richard Charles up to the mark, and made a man of him. At public meetings he felt himself a person of considerable importance. He was a J.P., and dispensed justice tempered with mercy. When that petition in the Litany relating to magistrates was read each Sunday in Craigvallen Church, Mr. Vince uttered the response very loud indeed, and with considerable emphasis. Though accustomed from his youth to leave the whole service in the minister's hands, and utter nothing save an "Amen" at rare intervals, Mr. Vince had learned to take his part in church, and spoke out audibly, with an idea that he was setting a "good example to the lower orders." He also sang—not very melodiously, but with much fervour. Though he had no voice, he had plenty of money ; and the rest of the congregation felt that in his square, well-cushioned pew, filled with hassocks of all sorts and sizes, Richard was the right man in the right place.

To quote the sexton, who handed round the poor-box (an affair like a small warming-pan, with half the lid cut off, attached to a handle long enough to enable the money receptacle to be thrust under the nose of the most distant worshipper), as much as five shillings was "lifted" every Sabbath morning out of the Craigvallen pew ; and on "collecting days they all give gold, down to the youngest child !"

Mr. Vince felt his to be a very valuable life, and it was for this reason, and not because he realised in the smallest degree he was truly a miserable sinner, and required mercy, that he prayed so devoutly for a body of which at Craigvallen he was the solitary representative.

"Has Mrs. Boyle heard any tidings of her purse?" asked the wife of this great man, as she followed the waiter, who slowly preceded her up the staircase.

"No, Mrs. Boyle has heard nothing of her purse, ma'am," answered the waiter, pausing in his ascent so as to allow time for the fashionable lady's still more leisurely pace.

"That is very sad," observed Richard Charles' wife, and though she did not feel sorry she looked grave.

"Very sad, indeed, ma'am," replied the waiter, after the exchange of which amenities and confidences he threw the door of Mrs. Boyle's sitting-room wide.

What he said turned out to be too true; the widow had heard nothing of her money, and "what's more," she added, "the police"—which word she pronounced as if the accent were on the first syllable—"don't think I ever will. It was in Bank of Ireland notes; and they say by the time I can find out the numbers they'll be changed into gold—ay, and spent, too, maybe."

"But did you not telegraph to Dublin to stop payment?"

"And me without a farthing of money in the wide world, and 'Tilda Sheill hadn't as much as five shillings she could lend me, and you gone when I got back here, and your husband left his office for the day, and the people here saying it would be of no good telegraphing because the bank would be shut! Ah, it's easy to talk! If you'd been running round the town like me, out of your senses with trouble, you'd know better than ask such a question as that."

"Surely, however, you have done something?—written to the bank, for example?"

"Berna has. I told her it was just throwing away a stamp, and we'd none to spare; but, of course, she knew best. Like yourself, she thinks she's cleverer than anybody else. You'll see, though, if any good comes of it."

"What do you intend to do now?" asked Mrs. Vince.

"Indeed, you may just do what you like with me. Take me on a car to the old poor-house and leave me there, or let me lie out on some doorstep till I'm dead with starvation and exposure. Maybe your husband would for very shame provide me a plain funeral. He surely wouldn't like it to be said his own cousin was buried as a pauper."

"Your mother takes a very gloomy view of affairs," observed Mrs. Vince, turning to Berna, whose contribution to the conversation so far had been *nil*.

"Her mother would like to be told what she has left to

make her take a bright view of anything?" interrupted Mrs. Boyle; "with the money gone that was all stood between me and destitution, I think I have good cause for gloom. Me and 'Tilda Sheill had settled how we'd start a sort of boarding-house for young gentlemen. She knows lots of clerks would have been proud to come. 'Tilda's a wonderful hand at cooking—you should have tasted the apple cakes she used to make!—and she says she's as good and quick as ever she was; so she could have seen to the dinners. She has got her wits about her. She planned it all in less than ten minutes. I was to see the rooms were kept straight and do the marketing and receive visitors, and we laid it out that Berna should do most of the sewing, and play and sing and make the evenings a bit lively; and then, after a while, perhaps some of the lodgers might have taken a fancy to her. As unlikely things have come to pass. There's no accounting for the girls that take a man's eye."

Mrs. Vince darted a quick glance in the direction of the young person whose future had been sketched out thus agreeably, and beheld Berna staring, with parted lips and horror-stricken expression, at her mother—the whole pleasing programme being evidently as new to her as to the lady of Craigvallen.

"I would never have done that, mamma," she said, with a firm ring in her voice Mrs. Vince had not before noticed.

"Indeed, miss; and what would you have done?"

"I do not know. Gone out as governess, or servant even, rather than live such a life as that amongst a number of young men."

"You're wonderfully set against young men. It is to be hoped the old ones won't be set against you."

The girl did not answer. She had uttered her protest, and now relapsed into silence, while Mrs. Boyle rambled on, recounting some delightful reminiscences of various Peters and Pats and Cons, who had all, if her own account might be believed, fallen under the spell of her beauty, and "gone to

the bad," or "taken to drink," or married "out of spite," or "shot themselves through the forehead," because she "wouldn't have a word to say to them."

From this ramble through the days departed she suddenly returned to the present.

"It's little I thought then," she said, "I'd ever be as I am now—left at the mercy of the world, without a creature to stand up for me, or say as much as 'Here's a pound to you, Milly.'"

"Still, you are not utterly destitute."

"I suppose you will tell me next three of us can live on sixty pounds a year! I'll go bail you pay your gardener the double of that, and find him a house, maybe, into the bargain, to say nothing of coals and potatoes. But, of course, you've a right to do what you like with your own, only let me be a warning to you. Never put it in the power of any living man to leave you penniless. If you do, grand as you are now, the day'll likely come you may want even a 'bap,' and find yourself not able to buy one."

"What a terrible picture you draw, Mrs. Boyle! You seem to have the lowest opinion of men."

"I've not been treated the way to make me have a high opinion of them. First of all, my own husband dying in debt, and not leaving a penny, so to speak, between me and destitution; and then, when in the fulness of my heart I come back, thinking to hear a kind word spoken, my father's brother's son as good as says, 'You're not fit even to sit under the dinner-table, like those Kings without thumbs mentioned in the Bible. Get off! I won't have you near me.' He might find me near him yet, when he least expects it."

"My husband is a little peculiar," deprecated Mrs. Vince.

"You needn't tell me that. I knew him before ever you did, when neither he nor his father was much to boast of—or much thought of, if you come to that."

"He is a self-made man," went on Mrs. Vince, without showing even a trace of white feather, "and as such, perhaps,

attaches somewhat undue value to the possession of wealth and the externals of rank. But his heart is sound, Mrs. Boyle; and I am sure, if you would only take him the right way, he could be induced in this extremity to help you."

"The right way! Why, I took him fifty—ay, a hundred—ways; and I might just as well have been talking to Macarthy's Fort. Ah! if ever a man was hardened by the things of this world, that man's name is Richard Charles Vince. And what will they do for him in the long-run? that is all I'd like to know. You may put silver and gold on his coffin, but he can't carry silver and gold with him into the next world, no matter what part of it he's bound for."

"That's very true, indeed," said the better half of Richard Charles Vince; "but whilst my husband is here, and in the command of money, do you not think it would be politic on your part to conform a little to his wishes? I see no reason to doubt but that he might be induced to add to your income if you would only concede something to his prejudices."

"Concede! Why, there never was so soft and yielding a creature as myself. As my poor father used to say, 'You're for all the world like hot butter, Milly; there's no knowing where to take hold of you.' O, he was the funny man! I think I can see him sitting by the fire telling some of his stories now."

With exemplary patience, Mrs. Vince, while declining to be drawn into any argument concerning the wit and wisdom of Vince senior, so happily deceased, led the widow on and on, till at length she contrived to get that lady into a corner, when she was forced to make full confession on the subject of ways and means. To extract anything from Mrs. Boyle she did not wish to tell was a proceeding fraught not merely with difficulty but danger—difficulty, because she could scarcely be pinned to any point; danger, for the reason that her reprisals were of the most nasty and unexpected nature. But Mrs. Vince had not steered her course amongst this world's sunken rocks and perilous shoals for nothing.

If the widow's retorts sometimes were hard to bear, her opponent smiled even while wincing. Mrs. Boyle could not taunt, or daunt, or cow her into retreat. Always the same calm and unbroken hollow square, always a bristling bayonet ready for use at a moment's notice, always a cool unmoved front. Mrs. Boyle, at length, was well-nigh crying with vexation; while Berna, though torn with shame and grief, could not but admire the consummate address with which Mrs. Vince surely, if slowly, advanced upon the widow's outposts, and captured them one by one, putting each entrenchment behind her as she marched triumphantly on, just as a good chess-player lays aside his captured pieces.

At the last, Mrs. Vince said, in her suavest accent,

"You really do seem in a position of considerable difficulty, my dear Mrs. Boyle. Let me see if I quite understand; correct me, please, if I am wrong. There is your annuity, the first payment of which will not be due until November. Beyond that you have nothing; no money, no furniture, very little jewelry, no friend, except my husband, likely to prove of use at such a juncture. You see it is best to look matters straight in the face. Immediately after your husband's death you wrote to the Dowager, as you call her, explaining the position fully, and requesting help. For answer, she sent the family solicitor to represent her at the funeral, and authorised him to give you fifty pounds—it was fifty, I think—and an intimation she would do no more for you—"

"Not if I went down on my bended knees," added Mrs. Boyle.

"Something to that effect, if not conveyed in exactly such terse language," said Mrs. Vince. "Then Sir Herbert Boyle, after stating he was not bound to give you sixpence, handed you two hundred and fifty pounds to—I forget the exact consideration."

"Be shut of me," explained Mrs. Boyle, with an awful candour.

"And he further agreed to pay such household bills as might be outstanding, and the cost of your and Berna's mourning—"

don't cover your face, child ; old women like your mother and myself must be practical, you know."

"Old women !" cried Mrs. Boyle. "If you choose to talk of yourself as old, I'm sure I've no objection ; but do not put me in the same boiling, if you please."

"Very sincerely I beg your pardon, and will amend my phrase. *Young* women, then, like you and myself, ought to have sense enough to look circumstances in the face. To sum up, you have lost all the money sent you by Mrs. and Sir Herbert Boyle, less your travelling and hotel expenses, and there is no source from which you can reasonably expect fresh supplies till November, which supplies will then be of the most meagre description."

"While you are rolling in riches," said Mrs. Boyle.

"Which we have certainly not taken from you," retorted Mrs. Vince, equal to that or any other occasion. "And now, on certain recognised lines, I may tell you that both my husband and myself desire to make your lot a little pleasanter. We will talk the situation over, and consider what we can do. Meantime, as you must be short of money, do not be vexed with me for leaving five pounds ; and while you stop here have everything, in moderation, you may require. I feel quite sure Mr. Vince will pay your bill."

And so, in fact, to cut a very long conversation short, Mrs. Vince departed, empowered to execute terms of almost unqualified submission on the part of that too fascinating person, Mrs. Boyle, if only Richard Charles would agree to make things a "bit better for her."

Mrs. Vince did not again delight Cunningham's with her presence ; instead, she wrote a letter to Mrs. Boyle, which that lady characterised as her "death-warrant." On certain conditions, Mr. Vince professed himself willing to pay his cousin's rent, and, in addition, allow her forty pounds a year. Further, Theoph Carpenter's daughter thought enough furniture could be spared from Craigvallen to render the cottage her husband had in view habitable.

"And that's all," commented Mrs. Boyle, "a man just wallowing in money can do for his own flesh and blood. Well, some day it'll maybe come home to him, and then he'll think of the way he treated me. Now, just take a pen in your hand, Berna, and write to the man; I'm that poor and miserable, I must accept whatever terms are offered me. Lord only knows where this place is they mean to put us; and I'm very sure Richard Vince doesn't care what it's like. And you saw, Berna, what *she* says—that if I agree to Mr. Vince's terms—*Mister*, indeed!—we're to move without delay. That's to save the hotel-bill. If I'd money enough I'd just order my winding-sheet at once, and have done with everything."

It was in this pleasant frame of mind that Mrs. Boyle entered upon the occupancy of Clear Stream Cottage. Mr. Vince knew the place well. He had been acquainted with that previous tenant, esteemed by Mr. Muir, who converted a howling wilderness of neglected kitchen-garden, full of cabbage-stumps, weeds, stones, and old shoes, kettles, broken delft, and refuse of all sorts into a smiling paradise, and considered it a suitable residence for the impoverished Mrs. Boyle.

"You will be near your friends the Pirns," suggested Mrs. Vince pleasantly, as she sat *tête-à-tête* with the widow. "Holywood is within a walk from here."

Mrs. Boyle shook her head. "It's little walking I'll do," she said. "The best thing for me would be to gather a pile of sticks and set light to myself, as the widows do out in India."

Not even the most genial of women could long have supported conversation conducted on such lines; and after she had for the fourth time inquired whether there were any other little thing which could be sent from Craigvallen likely to render the house more comfortable, and on each occasion being compelled to listen to a long tirade concerning the shortcomings of Ulick Boyle, the perfections of Millicent, relict of that unfeeling personage, and the tendency of most people, when they "get up a bit in the world," to "forget them-

selves," Marcella, daughter of Theophilus Carpenter, deceased, remarked she had no idea it was so late, and rose to go.

In the tiny hall she met Berna.

"I was gathering some flowers for you," said the girl. "Are they not sweet?" and she gave Mrs. Vince a bouquet, which that lady accepted with a smile.

"What's the use of sending such simple things to Craigvallen, Berna?" asked her mother; "they'll be reckoned nothing better than common weeds in that grand place. Just throw them on the road, Mrs. Vince, when you get outside; it'll save you the trouble of bidding your servants put them to the back of the kitchen fire."

"They shall certainly not go there," said the lady thus advised. "I mean to take them with me to a dinner-party this evening—and think of the giver often," she added in a lower tone to Berna.

Happily for all concerned, Mrs. Boyle declined to accompany her guest to the garden-gate.

"The sun would be sure to 'peel' my face," she was good enough to explain. "I don't know how you can go driving about, Mrs. Vince, without a bit of veil, or even a parasol; but to be sure that's one advantage you swarthy people have over us fair—you don't tan."

"No," answered the wife of Richard Charles, with unruffled good-humour, "I don't tan. Do you?" she added, turning to Berna. "No; then walk with me to the phaeton."

They walked together along the path leading to the narrow bridge, beneath which the stream rippled joyously on its way, and then through a mimic plantation of broom, syringa, gum-cistus, sumach, and roses.

"What a darling little place!" said Mrs. Vince. "I hope you like it?"

"Very, very much; particularly after that dreadful town."

"You must come and stay at Craigvallen;" but Berna shook her head.

"Could we not persuade your mother to do without you even for a week?"

"It is not that," hesitated the girl. "But it would not be right; I should not like—"

"To visit us unless your mother were invited also. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"You are again quite right. I beg your pardon;" and nothing more was said on the subject.

In the lane, close by the rustic gate, stood a groom, in front of as pretty a pair of cream-coloured cobs as the heart of woman need have desired to possess.

"What beauties!" exclaimed Berna, passing her hand caressingly over the hog's mane of the creature nearest to her.

"What a pity!" thought Mrs. Vince, as she looked at the slight girlish figure, at the well-poised head, with its wealth of glossy hair, the pure fair face, and the eyes divinely, deeply, darkly blue, and considered the mother to whom Berna was tied till death parted them.

At that moment a man, mounted on a stout roan horse—which he managed with much more ease than any one might have expected, from his loose build, long limbs, and generally awkward appearance—passed by, and bestowed a thoroughly critical and appreciative glance upon the Craigvallen turn-out.

Holding his reins and a heavy cutting whip in one hand, he touched his hat with the other—not out of deference to the two ladies, but from respect to Mr. Vince's money.

"What an extraordinary-looking person!" said Mrs. Vince, turning a backward glance after him. "Who is he?"

"That is Mr. Muir," answered Berna, "the landlord of Clear Stream Cottage—a *dreadful person*."

CHAPTER IX.

HAVING renewed that long-interrupted acquaintance with the author of his being—"Come to the knowledge of three strange sisters," as Miss Bell very truly remarked—turned his horse out to grass in one of the pleasant meadows lying down by the river, unpacked his effects and stowed them away in a roomy cupboard assigned to his use, Mr. Gorman Muir "took himself off" to Derry, in which maiden city there resided a gentleman called Baird, he had frequently met in Kilkenny, who would, he hoped, help him to obtain that post so universally coveted by various impecunious and incapable persons in Ireland—viz. an agency.

He was too old for the constabulary; he knew his chance of getting that vague "something under Government"—also a pitfall in the way of Irish youth and enterprise—was of the slenderest; but he felt sure he should make a capital agent.

He liked riding, driving, shooting, dining out, dancing, and the best society. He could sing a good song; tell a good story. He had been popular amongst the poor down in Kilkenny, and he believed he could get rent easily enough out of men bred and born in Ulster. Yes, an agency was the very thing. He would be almost his own master, and yet in the receipt of a fair salary. If it were necessary for him to work at all—and the young man could not close his eyes to the painful truth that such a misfortune was imminent—nothing could suit his abilities and temperament better than the management of a large estate.

He had not conceived the idea more than three days; he had but just taken his ticket at the York Street Terminus in Belfast, yet already that jade, Imagination, was at her old

tricks. No experience seemed able to protect the young man from her. Over and over again he found nothing save disappointment and confusion ensue from her antics. Nevertheless, once again she had him safely on her back, and only waited opportunity to take the bit between her teeth and bolt with this bold rider—over “bank, bush, and scaur;” through thorn and through water, till she at last found a convenient spot in which to throw him ignominiously into some black bog or quagmire which seemed bottomless.

To many minds, however, there is such a pleasure in the mad pace she goes and the wild excitement men can never know, save when following the lead of fancy in full flight, that they would compound for a good deal of disaster at the “finish” for the sake of the stretching gallop and the rattling pace after that wiliest of wily foxes—Possibility.

Mr. Gorman Muir, at all events, enjoyed his “spin” through fairyland. Having once quite decided an agency would suit him, and that he would suit an agency, nothing more remained to do save to settle the sort of agency he should prefer, and the smallest amount of salary he would condescend to receive. A small and highly cultivated estate he thought could scarcely give him sufficient scope. He wanted something with great tracts of mountain, and heath, and moor—with darkling lakes, the existence of which was unknown, save to the inhabitants—something where other men had failed to win love and confidence or woo prosperity—wide expanses of land, where the houses of hospitable and primitive gentry, possessed of pretty daughters and sons who “feared nothing and were willing to go at anything,” were sparsely scattered—where the Atlantic thundered in upon the coast, and the original stunted and red-haired Irish Celt, who could speak no English, was still to be stalked.

The man was nearly eight-and-twenty, yet romance was as strong in him as in a schoolboy. He devoutly believed in Tom Burke of Ours and the doings of Charles O'Malley. “The Collegians” woke a responsive echo in his soul—and he

could sing the song, "A place in thy memory, dearest," with such mournful pathos that old ladies wept, and at the same time with such seductive tenderness that young ladies felt they could almost have gone off with him on the spot. He was full of daring and poetry. "The Charge at Fontenoy" thrilled his very soul. He felt more than half-rebel when he read the short and stirring story of that gallant, if mistaken, band of "United Irish" gentlemen who paid the penalty of their lives for their patriotism; but when he turned back the page of Irish history to the siege of Derry he felt he saw written there a grander narrative still—of endurance as well as courage—a tale of well-nigh incredible patience and persistent fortitude. England seems always to have considered it rather "good form" to ignore. As some men live before their time, so Gorman Muir was living after his. Not one of Sir Walter Scott's novels but appealed to something within him that only echoed to the strain of wild adventure, the clang of armour, and the sound of martial music. He was one left over, as it might have seemed, by mistake from a generation long dead and gone, and yet with a love of pleasure and a capacity for settling to no work, and a thorough enjoyment in idleness which is the proud possession of the nineteenth century.

Such as he was, however, he had won his father's heart. Once again he could see in the flesh Katty Gorman's eyes shining like stars—dark, merry, dancing, wicked eyes. Not a tone, or gesture, or movement of the son but reminded him of that dead mother her "family" had rejected in life, but whose body they reluctantly received when it mattered little to her what became of it. Himself suspicious, mean, hard, calculating, he liked Gorman, because the young fellow was unworldly, generous, impressionable, and open-hearted.

"And I'm very sure, for all he says, that he's got a spice of he devil in him," considered Mr. Muir, as though that were the crowning grace a man might aspire to possess.

That he lacked the lighter accomplishment of *persiflage*,

possessed to such perfection by Ensign Ludham, was a fault the farmer felt willing to condone.

"He hasn't just such pleasant talk," considered Mr. Muir; "but there's a heap more in what he says," which was indeed quite true. Just at that time Mr. Gorman Muir's utterances contained a depth of bitterness and a knowledge of the worst side of human nature Solomon himself in his most *blasé* moments might have envied.

"It is to be hoped he will soon get something to do," observed Miss Muir, about ten days after Gorman's departure, "for I'm sure he'll never bear himself here. Of all the restless men I ever did come across, he's about the worst. A young chicken wanting its mother couldn't seem less content than he does."

"Maybe if you had been cast out into the wilderness like a second Ishmael you mightn't be just content either," said Mr. Muir.

"I'm very certain, if he had behaved himself, his uncle wouldn't have turned him from the door," persisted the lady, who still knew nothing of the real cause of quarrel between Gorman and Mr. Trevasson. "It doesn't stand to sense a man well on in life will put up with being told he's not to marry by one he has fed and seen to from a child."

"I don't say anything against that, Bell. I might one fine morning want to get married myself, and I'd take it ill if anybody was to say, 'There are fools enough in the world; don't you make one more.' The man, as you remark, had a clear right to marry if he liked; but I don't consider it was either right or just to send one about his business that he had brought up like his son."

"I'm very sure he would never have done anything of the sort if Gorman had behaved himself," repeated Miss Muir.

"I don't see any call you have to say Gorman didn't behave himself. Though he wasn't over fond of the new mistress, he would have left her alone, if she'd have left him. Of course we know all she wants is the old man's money; but

the old man ought to have considered he had brought the boy up 'delicately,' as you've heard read out in Proverbs, without trade or profession whereby to earn his living ; and I say it is hard on Gorman to be cast adrift at his age, and forced to buckle to work, after having had his hands kept soft and white like a lady's all his life long."

"Gorman's everything to you now," sneered the amiable Bell.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say he's everything, but he's a good deal," answered Mr. Muir.

"I'm not a bit surprised. That's only what was to be expected. But if you'd been less taken up with him and able to afford time to look about you at some goings on near home it might have been telling you."

"If anything was going on near home, Bell, it concerned me to know, you ought to have spoken."

"O, I can't be expected to have eyes and ears for the whole house."

"All I want at this minute is your tongue. What is it I ought to have been looking after? Who is it you deem is stealing from me now?"

"I'm not aware that I said anybody was stealing from you, though I did notice yesterday a bag of cruffles set up against the back gate. I bid Isaac empty them out on the heap ; and they were the very pick of the potatoes."

"You gave Nally, then, the trouble of sorting them all out again," retorted Mr. Muir ; "for I bid him take three or four stone of the finest he could find over to Mr. Garnsey. He has a wonderful 'conceit' of the Ardilaw cruffles."

"He has a wonderful conceit of anything he can get for nothing," amended Bell.

"So maybe," said Mr. Muir, harking back to the original question. "That other matter you've on your mind mightn't turn out of much more consequence than the potatoes."

"It might not," answered his daughter, in a tone which implied she meant precisely the opposite.

"Well, well, whatever it is, let's hear ; we'll never get at

the rights of the affair till you tell me what it is. Has it to do with the fresh tenants at the cottage?"

"No, it has nothing to do with the fresh tenants at the cottage; though I make no doubt there will be plenty to do with them before we're much older. As I remarked a minute ago, you've been so taken up with Gorman, and Gorman's horse, and Gorman's plans, and Gorman all the rest, you could not see what was going on under your own eyes. From the first I gave you as plain a warning as I could; but, of course, nothing I say is ever thought worth listening to."

"For the Lord's sake say what you've got to say, and have done with it. What's going wrong now? It can't be Carline—"

"No, to be sure it can't be Carline!" mocked Miss Muir. "You thought, I suppose, when you sent the last of the Ensign's luggage to Belfast, you had sent the harm he had done away with his bags and trunks."

"What harm did the man do?"

"O, if you want telling just like a child it is no use coming to me! I suppose you'll make out next you didn't know he'd filled Carline's empty head so full of nonsense she's never been one bit of use since he came into the house; she thinks he's going to make a lady of her, and that some day soon she'll be driving in her carriage drawn by four galloping horses like the Marchioness. If it wasn't for me you think so little of, she might have been off with him for all anybody would have known. You forget, I'm thinking, there's such a thing as a mail car passes the end of this road twice a day."

"Do you mean that the Ensign sends her letters?"

"And that she sends the Ensign back letters."

"I think you're under some mistake, Bell," hinted the farmer mildly. "No letters have come to this house for Carline. Gorman, as you know, went to the office every morning of his life while he was here, and it has so chanced since he left us I've been often passing that road and called in myself to see whether Mr. Liggett had anything for us."

"I know you were that anxious for news from Gorman you went to the post before there was time for a letter to come from him," scoffed Miss Muir. "And I know something more : that an old woman, I've told you over and over again, came about the house for no good, lives near Craigantlet. She's able enough to walk to the village, and she doesn't forget to call here as she goes and comes back, I'll warrant you. It'll not be long before you see her, or I'm much mistaken. Carline's writing a letter to him now."

"Where is she?" asked Mr. Muir, taking a step forward and then stopping.

"She's in the kitchen. I knew she had something in her mind this morning, she was so anxious to get up by herself into Gorman's room. I thought I'd put a stop to that, and set her to mind the apple-jam. I dared her to leave it one minute ; so what she's doing is writing a note on the bellows. She slipped the paper and pencil into her pocket as I passed through, and pretended to be afraid the fire was getting too low."

"If I could just make sure of it," said the farmer, with a set look on his stern face.

"Why don't you make sure of it, then? You'll do more harm than good if you say anything to Carline ; she'd have the note in the fire before you could look at her. She *is* a sly young cat."

"You are positive, Bell, Nanny Gribben's the go-between?"

"Hasn't she bought herself a new stuff dress? and didn't I see the silk square Mrs. Sinton bought Carline last Easter, pinned round Nancy's throat?"

Mr. Muir groaned at what he could but consider confirmation strong as Holy Writ. It was Miss Muir's hour of triumph, and she did not understand the meaning of mercy.

"Am I positive?" she said, quoting her father's question with fine effect ; "yes, I am as positive as I am that I know why Gorman wouldn't go to meeting with us."

"You are aware, Bell," suggested Mr. Muir, now quite cowed, "his uncle brought him up Church."

"O yes, I'm aware ; and he was going to church till I said, in joke, I'd as soon go to one place as another, and that nobody could get any harm by listening to old Mr. Crommles. I did it to try my gentleman ; for I had no more intention of going with him than of flying ; but, if you remember, he did not go to church here, then or since—walking off to Comber, and Holywood, and Castlereagh. He was ashamed to be seen out with us ; that's what comes of one of a family being brought up with notions above the rest."

Having fired which shot, Miss Muir departed to pursue those domestic vocations in which she shone as signally as in playing the congenial part of private detective.

Left to himself, Mr. Muir strolled down the avenue and out into the lane. There he lounged about for some time, after which he reëntered the gate, closing it behind him.

Presently there came down the hill an elderly woman, decently dressed, carrying a covered basket on her arm. As if just arriving on the scene, Mr. Muir sauntered forth, and accosted her with,

"Well, Nanny, and how's all with you to-day?"

She gave him a little bobbing curtsy, thanked him kindly and said "all" was pretty well.

"You looked in as you passed, I suppose?"

Yes ; Mrs. Gribben had looked in.

"Did you see any of my daughters?"

Mrs. Gribben had only seen Miss Carline. She was making the beautifullest apple-jam ; but then, to be sure, the Ardilaw apples had always been famous.

"How did you think she was looking?"

"Her face was all scorched up standing over the fire."

"And writing a letter you're taking to the post for her. I want that letter, Nanny. Better stop, and rest yourself a minute."

They had reached a point where a small stream meandered beneath the lane, and a low stone parapet protected the road on each side.

"Put down your basket," proceeded Mr. Muir. "It's fine and heavy; you ought to have something worth while in it."

The woman did not answer as she obeyed; she was white to her lips.

"Now you can give me that letter. I know who it's to; but I want to know what it's about, and I do not mean to stand arguing the matter with you. Hand out that letter, or I'll take you straight down to the barracks, and see what the sergeant will say to the things you've got in your basket."

"I've nothing, Mr. Muir—I've nothing, I'll take my gospel oath, but a few apples Miss Carline gave me to—"

"We'll see about that. Come along; the police will soon make you give up that letter."

"You can have the letter, Mr. Muir; but don't damage me, or be cross with the girl; she's—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Mr. Muir, pocketing the letter. "Now open that basket. Well, you have got a fine assortment of my property, I must confess—eggs, oats, whetstone, and curry-comb. Why, I blamed Isaac for taking the dandy brush last week. As I'm going back to the house, I can carry the curry-comb and whetstone in my hand. You may keep the eggs and the oats, if you send no word to my daughter about what has passed between us. Her lover shall get his letter safe enough, never fear—after I've had a look over it. And now mind my last word, Nanny: if ever I catch you inside my place again, it'll be worse for you."

Having uttered which dark threat, the farmer retraced his steps, never once looking back to the spot where Mrs. Gribben stood shaking her fist after him.

CHAPTER X.

THE following evening Mr. Muir announced his intention of next day repairing to Belfast. "So, if there's anything you want brought out, Bell," he added, "you'd best tell me before bed-time, as I'll be starting early."

It was in accordance with this arrangement that Carline had the satisfaction of seeing her parent drive off in his old-fashioned gig (bought a bargain), the jingling of which could be heard half a mile away. Never did music sound sweeter in the ear of any girl than the rattling of those loose spokes did to Carline as she ran into the house and hurried over her morning tasks, and afterwards, singing carelessly, passed through the front door, which stood wide, and strolled in the direction of the river. Once out of sight of any window, she quickened her steps and walked quickly up the glen till she reached a spot where the banks were high and the trees thick. Then she made her way down a winding foot-path to the bed of the stream, and, standing quite still, listened.

Instead of being but four miles distant, Belfast might have lain four hundred from the spot where she stood; not a sound, save the rustling of the leaves and the low murmur of the stream, broke the silence. It was noon of a glorious August day. Over the fields lay an utter stillness. Even the cattle lay at rest, chewing the cud lazily; the gorse-hedges on the hillsides were sheets of golden splendour; down where Carline stood nut-trees grew thick. The girl put out her hand and gathered a leaf; then she dropped it into the stream, and saw it float gently away. In fancy she followed it till it reached Strangford Lough.

"I spent a happy day there once," she thought, "when I

was a child. But I am happier now than I was then." And she lifted her eyes, which were full of a tender love-light, and looked up into the azure vault above her head.

She would have made a fair picture as she stood there beside the trickling water, with the trees bending down as if longing to touch her cheeks, their branches at times interlacing across the glen. She was young and foolish, and had not, perhaps, much in her; but she was beautiful. She had looked in the glass, and thought there was not anybody so pretty in the country, no girl with such long dark lashes, and eyes that—so said the Ensign—were deep and unfathomable as Glendalough! When she unbound her hair it fell almost to her knees; the Ensign had seen it loose in this way once, by accident, and she felt ashamed. For ever afterwards he raved about that hair. Poor little girl; poor, simple, silly little woman, who believed she needed nothing beyond dress, and jewels, and a carriage, and servants to be as fine a lady as any that ever went to Court! She stood there patiently waiting for her lover, and wondering which way he would come; and while she waited and wondered, her lover stole softly upon her from behind, and caught her in his arms.

"Dear good Carline—best, kindest Carline!" he said, as the girl, clinging to him, convulsively murmured, with passionate affection,

"I am so glad! I *am* so glad!"

"Glad are you, darling? Then you have missed me a little."

"A little!" she repeated. "O, I have thought such long for you! The days seemed as if they never *would* go by."

"You are the sweetest, you are the dearest, the loveliest little soul!" exclaimed young Ludham, emphasising each term of endearment with the full stop, for which grammar has no equivalent, that seems to those uninterested in the text the height of folly.

"I was so afraid I mightn't be able to give Bell the slip," said the girl shyly, her Irish idiom sounding very pretty;

and her manner, though countrified, coy and feminine, and, beyond all, utterly guileless.

"And how is the dear Bell?" he asked, drawing Carline once again close to him.

"Bell has nothing to complain of, thank you, Ensign," at this juncture interpolated a perfectly unexpected voice; "and she'll be proud, I make no doubt, to think you've kept a memory of her in your mind. You needn't disturb yourself. You had a hold of my daughter's waist a minute ago. You can keep your arm where it was if you like, for me."

"I assure you, Mr. Muir—"

"You needn't trouble yourself. I'm sure of all I want to be sure concerning. There's no call for you to put yourself about, Ensign. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, my daughter's not the first you've made love to, any more than she'll be the last. I think, though, you have, maybe, made a bit of a mistake, which it might be as well to rectify before we go further."

"I fear I scarcely follow you, Mr. Muir," stammered the officer, for once unequal to the occasion.

"That's all a pity; but I'll try to make my meaning clear. Don't run away, Carline," added the farmer, laying a grip of iron on his daughter. "I want you to hear all the pleasant talk, girl, your sweetheart and myself are going to have together. I mean to go a piece back with you, Ensign. You won't mind that, I hope?"

"How could you think otherwise?" murmured the Ensign, who, if he failed to grasp the beauty of the Irish idiom as well from the mouth of a man as from the honey-laden lips of a girl, could at least hazard a conjecture as to what was coming.

"You may remember"—and there was an unconscious dignity in Mr. Muir's gaunt ungainly figure as he stood beside the river, with the arching branches above his head and the sunlight streaming through the leaves and flickering upon his hard-set features, looking straight at the man who would have

done him the cruellest wrong one person can inflict upon another—"a day when you were out with the stag-hounds, and got staked instead of your horse?"

"My memory is not so short for kindness, Mr. Muir," the Ensign was beginning; but Mr. Muir motioned him to keep silence, and proceeded,

"It so happened I was driving past, and, without knowing who you were or what you were—except a young English officer, far from your home, a stranger in a strange country—I brought you to Ardilaw, as there was not a house at hand where you could have been properly done by—"

"Is it necessary to go on heaping coals of fire upon my head?" asked the young sinner.

"It is. If you had minded what the book out of which you got those words tells you, I should not have found you standing with your arm about my daughter. I want to say nothing concerning gratitude, or anything of that sort. What we did, we did without thought of fee or reward. As you know, you offered to pay, and your mother offered to pay; and I said I'd take nothing. Money could not have bought the heart and the will with which we did for you when you could do nothing for yourself. In your father's house you might have got better lodging and richer food, but you could have had no more careful nursing than you got when you were that bad you could not lift a cup to your lips or turn yourself in your bed."

"Have you no pity?"

"Not a bit for one like you. We thought nothing of what we did; we asked nothing—we took nothing. I never looked for gratitude any more than I looked for wrong. I never deemed the young fellow I took to for his good looks and pleasant ways—you were, beyond ordinary, patient and considerate for a sick man—would try to bring disgrace upon me. I'd have knocked any one down that had evened such a thing to you in my hearing—I would;" and the farmer's brow knit and his voice deepened and trembled as the rage surging within him tried to break the bounds he had set for it.

"Mr. Muir—".

"My daughter ought to have been to you, in a manner, like your own sister. No lady in the land was entitled to more respect at your hands. If she had been light and flighty—which my girl never was—it would have been your place to keep her at arm's length sooner than give her an hour's heart-ache. My God!" suddenly cried out the man in a voice hoarse with passion, "I could find it in my heart to strike you dead where you stand when I think of the depth you would have dragged her down to before you flung her off as you might a glove."

"Upon my soul, you wrong me. You are quite mistaken—"

"Mistaken, am I? Then I humbly beg your pardon. It was only, you see, my want of conceit led me astray. I didn't think, I didn't really, that you wanted to marry my daughter. She's not ill-looking; but she has no fortune that you would account a fortune; and I did not possess the money, even if I had wanted to do such a thing, to give her the education you've been used to among those you've consorted with. Such things needn't trouble me, though, if they don't trouble you. She's quick enough, and she'll soon learn something of the ways of those above her. Why did you not come and ask me long ago? I'd have made no objection. She is promised, as you know, to a decent man's son; but we will get over that some way. Ladies jilt their lovers, so I am told. Why wouldn't a farmer's daughter take a better offer when she could get it?"

The officer stood silent. Speech failed him.

"You're not so ready as I've heard you, Ensign," said Mr. Muir; "the prospect of such happiness makes you dumb. When is it to be? No need to stop for the wedding garments. 'A bonny bride,' you know, 'is soon buskit,' and Carline is as bonny a girl as a man need wish to marry, though I say it."

"Mr. Muir—"

"Yes, Mr. Muir's listening; what have you got to say to him?"

"May I speak to you for a minute or two, alone?"

"Not without my daughter. It's the right of the girl you want to make your wife she should hear what we are talking about."

"Well, then, Mr. Muir, you must be quite aware I am totally dependent upon my father. I have not a shilling beyond my pay, except the amount he allows me; and should I marry without his consent—"

"I quite comprehend; you needn't say another word. You want to be married privately. I have no objection. Of course I should have preferred the whole thing to be open and above-board; still, you know your father best, and I make no doubt you're right not to cross him. Take her as quietly as you like. There are plenty of churches in Belfast. Get a license, and I'll drive her up some morning, and nobody need be a bit the wiser. Why, that doesn't seem to please you either, Ensign. Hadn't you better speak out plain, and tell the girl and me what's on your mind?"

"You are totally mistaken, Mr. Muir," said Ensign Ludham, now fairly at bay. "You must be perfectly well aware that in all ranks a man may have a flirtation with a pretty girl, and yet—"

"Go on, Ensign."

"It does not necessarily follow because a man admires a girl, and has paid a few compliments to her, that—"

"I am listening, Ensign; won't you finish what you've begun?"

"In plain English, then, Mr. Muir—"

"Yes, Ensign, in plain English, what have you got to say about my girl?"

"That—that—"

"You want the marriage deferred, maybe? No; never stamp your foot. You've only to say what you mean, and—"

"Mr. Muir, you are pretending to be labouring under a great delusion."

"Am I? Then it's all your own fault. Why don't you speak out your meaning plain?"

"I have. In so many words, I have told you I am in no position to marry."

"You hear that, Carline?"

The girl did not answer—no, not a word; she only stood looking at her lover, an expression of dumb anguish on her pretty face, a plaintive terror in her dark-gray eyes.

"So you were only making game of her, Ensign, after all? Taking your diversion, and never caring what it might cost the girl. After that, I think we may go. Now she knows from your own lips, I'm not afraid she'll ever meet you again. She might not have taken my word for all this, but she can't be off believing you. He led you to believe, Carline, he meant to make a fine lady of you, didn't he?"

She formed an assent with her lips, but her tongue refused its office.

"Well, well! Your betters have been deceived before now by such as him. I think we'll be going, Ensign; we've heard about enough." And without another word Mr. Muir turned on his heel, and, motioning his daughter to precede him, ascended the bank, and began wending his way back to the house.

He walked a little distance in silence, then looked at Carline, who was dragging herself wearily by his side.

"Let this be a warning to you, girl," he said, and stretched out his hand, which she took and held in silence.

"When you get indoors," he went on, "put what you are likely to need together. I am going to take you after dinner to Mrs. Sinton for a while, where that young rascal won't find you, and beyond the reach of Bell's tongue. You'd like well to go to Mrs. Sinton, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," she murmured; "I'd like to go to her—any place out of this."

"She's a good sort of a woman," observed Mr. Muir; "and I can trust her with you;" and no further remark passed between them on the subject.

That night Mrs. Sinton was awakened by the sound of a wailing cry,

"O, I wish I hadn't plucked it! What made me pluck it?"

"What are you moaning over, Carline?" asked Mrs. Sinton, who was a widow.

"I was thinking about a leaf I plucked to-day and threw in the water. It has been tossing from place to place all the day long, and it's out in the weather and the dark by itself. I wish I had taken thought, and left it alone."

Mrs. Sinton did not answer in words; she only took the girl close in her arms, and drew the tired head on her breast, and kissed the fresh young lips, and sighed "O dear, O dear!" at intervals, as she lay awake thinking till long after day had dawned.

CHAPTER XI.

THE confession of failure can never, under any circumstances, be other than disagreeable ; but such a confession becomes doubly unpleasant when it has to be made to those of a man's own household.

There were many things Gorman Muir would have preferred to returning home and telling his father that Mr. Baird had seemed more inclined to flout than to favour him. The news that he was in disgrace must, the young fellow fancied, have flown from Kilkenny to Derry ; at all events, the fact met him the moment he crossed Mr. Baird's threshold.

"If you are wise you will try to make matters up with your uncle," said that gentleman. "As for an agency, Mr. Trevasson would have helped you to that or anything else in reason."

The cold shoulder is not a palatable dish ; and Gorman had almost too much of it. In every possible form it was served up for his delectation. No matter where he went or what he applied for, a morsel of the abhorred food was thrust under his nose. Those acquainted with his origin had grudged him his prosperity ; and now he was down many a foot was raised to give him a sly or open kick. As a matter of course, the Gormans had never looked kindly upon Mr. Trevasson's adoption scheme ; and there was rejoicing all through their borders when they heard the gates of Mount Michael were closed upon the son of Hewson Muir.

Gorman had not been accustomed to such diet as was now provided for him, and he made creditable efforts to refuse it. All in vain, however. The story of Mr. Muir's marriage, more than a quarter of a century old though it was, might have been

a perfectly fresh tale, so frequently was it repeated, so eagerly was it listened to.

The son of that ill-assorted union had better have stayed away from Derry, where all the facts were as well known as the appearance of the cathedral clergy. In provincial towns a scandal never diès ; and upon the ins and outs of the Muir-Gorman alliance, nine-and-twenty years' gossip had conferred a dramatic and unholy immortality. It was there Gorman heard the whole story in its integrity ; there, for the first time, he saw the broad lands and stretching moors of Clonmellin ; there he sat in the bailiff's house whence his grandfather had been driven in disgrace ; there, by feeing the housekeeper, he was permitted—an entire stranger—to walk through the room where Miss Katty, the gipsy, as she was still called, had danced and laughed, and deceived the "old lady," and gone out for the last time, cursed by her father, in company with a man who was "no fit match for such as her."

There, also, he met with one of his cousins "over for the shooting"—a tall, lanky-looking fellow, with long face, small shrewd blue eyes, and hair as nearly red as hair can be—who directed him on his road, unwitting they were of the smallest kin to one another. An alien and a stranger, he paced the seashore over which, with girlish glee, his mother had once watched the white-lipped waves chasing each other.

He felt lonely in his very soul. Had there been one to say, "God save you kindly," or "Welcome to the old place," he could have borne it better. It was the sense of utter desolation, the feeling that none knew, none cared what had become of Catherine Gorman's child, which seemed to kill all manliness within him. As he looked out over the Atlantic lying still and peaceful like a giant asleep, he could have wept tears saltier than the salt sea's brine, thinking of the mother he had never known, and his own past, which could come back no more. A few months previously what had he not been ? what had he not hoped ? what had he not expected ? and now—now—with an impatient gesture, he dug his heel into the

shingle, remembering all that brief time had taken from him. He was an outcast from the home and the rank to which he had been accustomed since childhood. He was too old to take life in his hand and go out to meet fortune. He had been brought up to great expectations, and behold! in a moment, those expectations resolved themselves into fifty pounds, and a possible thousand to the back of them.

Like his poor young dead mother, to whom such terribly bitter fortune—all of her own choosing—came before she counted one-and-twenty years, he had heard the portals of “home” clang behind him, and listened to the echoes of a curse that still seemed to float around his head.

He remained mooning about Derry and its neighbourhood longer than the hospitality extended to him or the slender state of his purse seemed to warrant, merely because he could not summon up courage to return to Ardilaw.

Though far from happy in the maiden city, he knew he was less miserable there than must prove to be the case under his father’s roof. He had been prepared to meet with many things certain to be antagonistic to every taste and habit of his previous life; but he found it well-nigh impossible to think with equanimity of the man who called him son, and who at length urged his return home, saying,

“You’re just spending your substance for naught up where you are now. Better come back, and we’ll try whether there is nothing you can get to do in Down. Mr. Garnsey will give you a commission that may put a few pounds in your pocket. As for going to Dublin, as you talk of—go if you like, but take Ardilaw in your way. I mean to try and get the most of the corn cut next week. If the weather holds up, the crop needn’t be despised. No word from your uncle yet? I am afraid you have nothing in writing about that thousand pounds.”

“No,” said Gorman, when Mr. Muir repeated this question verbally; “I have nothing in writing; and, moreover, if I had, I would not enforce my claim.”

"It is little use putting yourself out about what you might do, as it does not lie in your power to do anything," commented Mr. Muir, with exasperating coolness. "And there's no call to get angry with me because I ask you a simple question. I don't throw it up to you that your luck's out at elbows. That's not exactly your own fault. All that troubles me now is what you are to turn to."

"I wish to heaven I knew," said his son.

"You know you are more than welcome here ; but—"

"I could not remain here idle ; it would kill me."

"I see that—and I see, too, you've been brought up with the idea of doing no work which is not pleasure. It's a very good notion of life in its way, but I'm afraid it won't find a man in victuals and pocket money, for all that."

"I am quite willing to work. I'll follow the plough, if need be," said Gorman, with some temper.

"We won't begin ploughing much before November, but you can try your hand then if you like," answered Mr. Muir dryly.

"I will go to Dublin first, and see whether there is not any chance of an agency."

"Best keep your travelling expenses in your pocket," advised his father. "Who have you got that you could go to outside your uncle's friends? and you know what they'll say to you. The wisest thing for you to do is, lie quiet for a bit, and keep out of sight and hearing of the old man's acquaintances till he begins to be anxious about you. There are things to be done hereabouts, if you'd only do them—and money to be made, granting you were willing to make it."

"If you wish me to turn horse-dealer, of course I ought to raise no objection."

"Man alive ! only to hear you. Horse-dealer, indeed ! And if you *were* a horse-dealer, come to that, where would be the disgrace ? Why, look at old Cleery, out on the road to Comber—you've seen the fine house he has built himself, with the big greenhouse full of flowers, and his daughters able to

play and sing and talk French, and they dress as well as the Marchioness, though, of course, there's a something about them by which you can tell they're not just real born ladies—well, he started in life as stable-boy at Purdy's Burn, but he'd a taste for horses and a judgment about them, and has worked himself up and on till he's made himself what you see—”

“A pattern for imitation,” said Gorman, with grim distinctness.

“His name is in everything about. His Lordship's agent has always a civil word for him. It's Cleery this and Cleery the other; and ‘What do you think of “the favourite”?’ or ‘Why are they laying such odds against King at Arms?’ No, you needn't wrinkle up your brow and let down your mouth. I don't say you would be proud of notice like that, but if you had not been brought up soft you would know it is scarce to be despised.”

“I am afraid I could not hope to emulate the extraordinary success Mr. Cleery has achieved,” remarked Gorman, his voice sounding hoarse and hard as he spoke.

“You might do something, at any rate,” answered Mr. Muir, too wise to take any notice of the bitter ring in his son's tones. “Mr. Garnsey made you a fair offer; and I'm very sure there was nothing in his offer the best gentleman in the land need have drawn a thraw mouth over.”

“I shall be glad to accept Mr. Garnsey's offer,” said Gorman slowly. “Beggars, you know, must not be choosers.”

“If I was young like you, if I had a face such as yours, and a figure such as yours, and ways such as yours, it's not of beggars or beggary I'd be talking,” exclaimed Mr. Muir. “I'd be casting about instead to see where there was a young woman possessed of a fine fortune and the best of relations, and, when I found out, ask her to be my wife.”

“Ay, indeed?”

“Faith, and indeed; and you wouldn't have far to look. Up at Beechfield there's just the wife for you, if you don't let her slip. An only daughter, too—and never a son!” with

which final statement Mr. Muir felt so charmed he had to stop in his discourse and laugh to himself, the while Gorman regarded him with abhorrent astonishment.

"I hate Miss Garnsey," he said, at last, "a degree more than I do Mr. Garnsey. I think him the greatest blackguard I ever spoke to, and I consider his daughter the least feminine woman a man need desire to meet."

"What ails you at her? You might travel Down through, you might travel Ireland through, before you'd meet with a better-natured, freer-spoken young woman than Miss Lydia Garnsey."

"The Lord be praised for that, at any rate."

"I'd have thought, now, she and you would have hit it off from the first minute you met. She's not to say handsome, I allow; but by the time a man's married three months he finds looks make little odds to him; no, not if a woman was Venus herself—and—"

"Look here," interposed Mr. Gorman Muir, "if we are to agree, let us keep clear of the subject of matrimony altogether."

"Well, well; I see you are hard to drive—"

"I am, and the devil himself couldn't lead me along any road at the end of which I might have to take Miss Garnsey for better or worse. I'll do what her father wants, as it may please you; but I wouldn't marry that girl if she was hung with diamonds."

"I wonder what you want. She's good to the poor, and she's fit to consort with the rich. It does not signify a farthing to her, whether there's fever or smallpox in any house: in she goes with her little can of soup, or pot of jelly, or custard pudding, or—"

"What she does or leaves undone is nothing to me."

"Faith, you are hard-mouthed, Gorman. I wonder what's the sort of bit you would answer to. It is quite unreasonable the way you talk, about a girl, too, who can go across country like a bird. Where would you find her like in the saddle?"

"Nowhere, I hope," retorted Gorman. "It's no use, I tell you, talking about Miss Garnsey to me. If ever I start a wife—which is most unlikely—I'll look out for a woman who can talk about something else than horses and dogs—a quiet girl, who would be ashamed to joke with grooms and helpers and vets., as Miss Garnsey does."

"Whoever you marry, man, steer clear of the quiet ones. Why, my third wife, Carline's mother, was as quiet-looking and soft-spoken a creature as ever made a man's life a terror to him. Well I mind the first hour I ever set eyes on her. It was very early of a summer's morning, in the first part of June. The dew was not off the grass, and the hawthorn was in full flower; the air was laden with it. I was living at Kilmoon then, and had to be in Donaghadee by seven, and so started off betimes. There were not many stirring on the road, and I was driving steady, for I knew the mare would have a hard time of it before our day's work was done; when, just as I was passing Summerfield, I saw a female sitting on the bank in a bare place of the hedge."

Mr. Muir paused. For his son's edification, he had raised a ghost from out the past, and he did not seem to like its aspect.

"And she was—"

"Carline's mother. Some day, maybe, I'll tell you the whole story, though I have never cared to talk much about the three years I passed with her. What I started to say was, give the woman that speaks low and slow—scarce raising her voice above a quiet whisper—the widest berth you can manage. The Atlantic wouldn't be too much space to keep between you. Miss Garnsey mightn't be just to your mind; but, at any rate, you see in the first ten minutes all the harm there's in her. As for the good, that story couldn't be told out in a day. There's not an old wife for miles round but could find something to say to her credit."

"When is Carline coming home?" asked Mr. Gorman Muir, who put the question, not because he felt anxious for

his sister's return, but simply for the reason that he desired to end the Miss Garnsey controversy.

"I'm not just sure," answered the farmer. "If it suits Mrs. Sinton to keep her, I'd like well for her to stop where she is till all is settled for the wedding."

"What wedding?"

"Why, hers. She has been promised for the last two years to young Robert Cragland. He has been away in Dumfriesshire, learning more about sheep and suchlike than he could do here; and his father and me weren't able to agree exactly about the money I am to pay down with Carline. I have made up my mind, though, now to stretch a point and give what he wants—for I couldn't and wouldn't be troubled looking after her here. A husband is the fittest person to see a woman keeps straight."

"She is certainly very pretty," remarked Gorman, thinking he was expected to say something.

"She's not bad-looking," agreed Mr. Muir; "and though she does not strain after her mother in her ways, yet I shall never feel quite easy about her now. There's always somebody to put notions in a foolish girl's head; and the lesson she got over the Ensign may not last her as long as it should."

"What did the Ensign do?"

"Why, he got making love to her; and they began writing to one another on the sly, and making appointments to meet, unknown, as they thought, to anybody. A hint was given me, so I came back one day, and made a third in the party. I asked him a few plain questions that he could not exactly answer, and I compelled the girl to stop and hear him confess what a hound he was. That's why I sent her away. As for the Ensign, I thought it best to clench that nail; so I made it my business to see his Colonel, and get my gentleman leave for a while."

"Why did you not send for me?" exclaimed Gorman, "I'd have taught him a lesson he wouldn't have forgotten in a hurry. It's not too late to horsewhip him now."

"Just you sit quiet. There's no need to distress yourself. If I'd thought a flogging was the best thing, I could have laid into him myself, but I wanted no stir made over the matter. Old Cragland was never to say too sweet about the match, and Carline's not likely to fall in with so good a chance again. Upon the whole, I think I'll bring her home soon. If she stops away too long people might begin to talk, and I don't think anybody will come skulking round the place for a while, at any rate."

"He'd better not," said Gorman, "if he has any respect for his bones. Talk or no talk, I'd make him repent the day he tried to fool Carline."

"Don't put yourself out. The Ensign won't show his face again in a hurry at Ardilaw, nor his Colonel neither. *He* rode down to tell me he had given Mrs. Ludham a hint of what was going on, and arranged the young man should not come back while the regiment stopped at Belfast. We put up his horse, and he looked over the place, and made as though he had a notion of buying one of the colts; and he went round the garden and seemed pleased to see damsons again, and I asked him if he could eat a mouthful of cheese and some good oat-cake, and he said yes, and had that and a jugful of milk, and sat a long time talking most agreeably. I declare he took me in, if ever a man did. I had not a notion of what he was waiting for till he said, 'I hope Miss Carline is quite well.' I answered that she was; and then I just laughed in his face, and told him she wasn't at home, and that if she was he shouldn't see her.

'I didn't get rid of the Ensign to be bothered with the Colonel,' I remarked. 'I couldn't write to *your* mother, if you've got one; and who would I apply to to give *you* leave of absence?'

"You never saw a man so taken aback in your life. He tried to make light of my notion, but it was the right one. He didn't stop long after that, and he never said another

word about the colt ; and I haven't heard a syllable from him from that day to this."

With a muttered oath Gorman Muir sprang from his chair, plunged his hands fiercely in his pockets, and commenced walking up and down the room.

"Man alive !" exclaimed his father, who had only the vaguest idea as to what was the matter, "you can put on an awful look. Don't bend your brows and set your mouth like that. The Evil One himself could scarce have a worse cast of countenance than you have at this minute."

"The Evil One himself could scarce feel worse than I do at this minute," retorted Gorman, with a sudden gust of fury Mr. Muir deemed it best "to let blow by" ere adventuring upon any other topic of conversation.

CHAPTER XII.

CARRYING a bouquet of hot-house flowers in one hand, and a fancy basket filled with autumn fruit in the other, Mrs. Boyle entered the only sitting-room Clear Stream Cottage boasted, where Berna sat sewing diligently. At sight of her mother the girl rose, and placing both bouquet and basket on the table, would have assisted to remove shawl and bonnet, but that Mrs. Boyle waved her impatiently back.

"Can't you let me alone?" she inquired. "Don't you see I've hardly a leg left to stand on? I must rest myself before I take off my things. It *is* a drag from that railway station—if ever there was an out-of-the-way place, it's this. Richard Vince needn't have been afraid of meeting me in Belfast often when it's a day's journey to the train from here before a body has walked a step in the town. I'm just fit to drop off my feet, having to carry such a burden all along that dusty road, and hold my dress up into the bargain."

"I am so sorry. If I had only known which train you were likely to come by I would have met you, mamma," said Berna.

"Yes; and it was so likely a thing I'd know the train I could come by," answered Mrs. Boyle, with a pettish impatience by which her daughter knew too well things had not been going quite to her mind. "If you'd been like any other girl, I needn't have gone by myself, or travelled back by myself; but it's well seen who you take after. Not me, I'm very sure. It's no wonder the Pirns think little of me when my own child won't visit my friends."

"They have given you some beautiful flowers," remarked Berna, bending over the bunch, and touching the buds tenderly.

"That's only to show that they have got such things, and to break my heart thinking of what good fortune falls to other people, and nothing but ill-luck to me! Though they have their carriages and their horses, they couldn't offer to drive me home; and not a word about my stopping to dinner and stay over the night, as I made up my mind to do, if for nothing but to oblige them. It's a hard world, Berna; and, maybe, you're just as wise to keep out of it. Mr. Pirn did let drop a word hoping you would go to a dance there; but I threw cold water on the notion. I said, if you didn't go to my own cousin's at Craigvallen, it wasn't over and above likely you'd go to *them*. I know that cut Mrs. Pirn, for she'd give anything if she could only get asked to Richard's."

Berna made no comment; she merely moved back to her seat, and would have resumed her work if Mrs. Boyle had not interposed:

"What are you sewing now? Can't you leave off for even a minute, when you know how it tries me to see you stitch, stitch, stitching, as if you had to earn your bread by your needle? I can't talk a bit while you keep on with that seam, and my heart just bursting with vexation. They've set up a butler and a footman, if you please; and everything is as genteel and precise as if they were lords and ladies. It's enough to make anybody laugh! Many's the time I've seen Mrs. Pirn's old aunt hanging out the clothes—and a beautiful colour she kept them; I'll say that for her. Poor old girl! it would put the surprise on her if she could come back and see the house, fit for any nobleman, her niece has got into now."

"Had I not better put those flowers into water?" suggested Berna.

"The—flowers—can—wait," said Mrs. Boyle, with a drawling intonation peculiarly aggravating; "considering the time they have been on the road here, and the heat of my hand, a few minutes more can't hurt them; and, indeed, I was in two minds to throw the things away as I came along, I felt so

angry when I thought of the distant way the Pirns treated me. Mrs. Pirn told me the best story, though, I've heard this many a day, and all about Mrs. Vince. Ah! it's no wonder she tries to be civil to me, considering she owes everything she has in the world to my own cousin. It's a poor way she'd have been in this day if it hadn't been for Richard Vince."

"I think Mr. Vince was very fortunate to meet with so nice a wife."

"I'm not so sure of that; by what I understand, he might have had the pick of the North of Ireland. It's wonderfully gratifying to hear how much he is respected, and the heaps of money he has got, and the grand people he knows; and you may be sure I didn't open my mouth and tell Mrs. Pirn he wouldn't look to the side of the street I was on if he could help it. I made her think they were fairly crazy to get us to Craigvallen, and that it was only our pride wouldn't let us go there constantly."

For the second time Berna took up her work, but, remembering her mother's objection, laid it down again.

"What was I wanting to tell you? What was I saying? You've put it clean out of my head. What in the world could it be?"

"Something about Mrs. Vince."

"To be sure; how could I forget? You would never guess the way she got to be mistress of Craigvallen."

"No; I cannot guess," said Berna.

"Well, it's just a proof of the things people will do for money—and people that have held their heads high enough too. Why, in the county Antrim there wasn't a family thought more of themselves than the Carpenters of Cherryfield. There were not wanting those that said the first of the name had risen from low enough; but every family must have a beginning, as it mostly has an end, and the Carpenters were grand people when I first remember them, I can tell you that."

"One has only to hear Mrs. Vince speak to be sure of that," agreed Berna.

"Sure of it? Yes; you might be sure of it if you'd never set eyes on Mrs. Vince. I'm not in the habit of telling you anything but what's sacred truth; and, after living all my life in the best of society, I wouldn't need an ignorant slip of a girl like you to instruct me in speaking."

"I never thought of doing anything of the kind," said the "ignorant slip," appalled.

"See you don't, then. I never was one that had much liking for being bidden, and I am not going to begin now. Well, as I was remarking, in all our part of the country the Carpenters were allowed to be the grandest people out. There was nothing they stood still for—carriages and dress, and governesses and masters, and servants, and I couldn't tell you what all. Many's the time when I was a young child, about three years old, I have seen Miss Marcella—that's Mrs. Vince, you know—galloping past my father's house on her pony with her sisters—they were older than her, you understand. She used to wear a blue habit, and a cap like a boy's; and you'd have heard them all laughing as they went tearing across the commons like mad things. I wonder if Richard ever thinks now of how they used to splash him as they rode by. I have heard him swear against them awful, though you would think, to look at him now, a bad word had never passed his lips."

"And how did they lose their money?" asked Berna, who, while conversing with her mother, was always searching about for six inches of safe ground to stand upon, and always somehow slipping into water.

"How did they lose it? I declare you're enough to drive anybody mad. If I've told you once I've told you a hundred times the way Theophilus Carpenter squandered his substance. He bet on races; he would go to London and lose as much over a game of cards in one night as would have kept a moderate family for a year. He had his hunters and his hacks, and the house full of extravagant company, and wine such as my father often said the King needn't have been ashamed to set before his Lords, temporal and spiritual; and if ever anybody

ought to have known about spirits it was my father—he rarely went to bed a night of his life sober.”

Mrs. Boyle paused a moment in ecstatic contemplation of her parent's virtues ere she resumed :

“The extravagance of that house, he used to say, might have made a bald man's hair stand on end. And so things went on and on and on, till at last there came a crash. It was one night when they were playing cards, a private note came to Mr. Carpenter, and he asked some gentleman to take his hand for him while he sent an answer. Well, my dear, nobody in that room ever set eyes on him again. What does he do but start away without even a change of linen, and get himself clean off to France. He never came back. In a minute the whole of the glory of Cherryfield was snuffed out, like the wick of a candle. The bailiffs went into the house, and the family left it. For a while Mrs. Carpenter and her daughters lived among their friends, but they soon tired them out. One girl was glad enough to marry a poor curate she had turned up her nose at when she could look at nothing lower than marquises and baronets ; another was taken out to India by some great lady they had influence with ; a third died. I don't know what was done for the sons, but they were drafted off abroad ; and so, to cut a long story short, at last they all dwindled down to this Marcella, who stopped with her mother on a trifle of money that was scraped some way together out of the estate.”

“Well, mamma?” inquired Berna, really interested in a story which possessed some family features in common with her own.

“*Well!*—what do you mean by *well*? I never heard anybody like you. I daresay Marcella thought it ill enough when the old lady died, and she was left with little more than the clothes she stood up in.”

“It was very hard,” murmured Berna.

“I make no doubt she thought so ; but it wasn't any harder for her than it has been since for other people.

Remembering her own troubles, anybody might have concluded she'd have had some feeling for mine. It seems she tried and tried to get something to do. Mrs. Pirn did say she heard she went as a nursery governess, but she couldn't be just sure; and she might have gone out as nurse next if she had not bethought her of my cousin Richard. One fine morning she knocks at his door and asks to see him. You may be sure she had put on her best manners as well as her best gown. He was at his breakfast, and, not to seem high, he told the servant to show her in; and as he couldn't just forget, low as she had come down, that he was talking to Miss Carpenter, once upon a time of Cherryfield, he made her take a chair, and poured her out some tea, and made as much of her as though she was Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. At last the mischief was revealed. She wanted a situation as housekeeper: could he tell her of any one needing such a thing, and would he recommend her? He thought a while, and said, 'Yes, if she wished, he would endeavour to forward her views; but,' he went on, 'I think you might do better.'

'In what way?' she asked, as if she hadn't a notion of his meaning.

'Why, come and keep house for me,' he made answer. And then in so many words he said, would she be his wife? And the upshot of the matter was that, three months after, they were married, and all the country-side was at the wedding; and who so grand and affable as Mrs. Richard Vince, and who so proud as the foolish man who had let himself be caught so neatly?"

"I do not believe the story, mamma," declared Berna indignantly. "Mrs. Pirn must be mistaken."

"I believe it, then; and that's enough. Things are coming to something, I'm sure, when children fly in the face of their parents, and settle what's to be said and what's to be told. You wait till Mrs. Vince comes out here next, and I'll give her a sly hint I know all about how she got my cousin. I know the way I'll do it."

"You never shall have the chance of doing it," thought Berna ; but she made no comment. She only took up her work, this time with the firm intention of getting on with that seam, which, if left to Mrs. Boyle's idle fingers, would never have been finished.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I THINK," said Mrs. Boyle, after a silence broken only by the sound of Berna's busy needle and her own sighs, "I might take a cup of tea now, if it was hot and not too much milk in it."

Berna laid aside her work. "I will tell Ruth," she eagerly proposed. "She is baking soda-bread. Shall I butter you some?"

"If you do, mind you bring me in no more than the breadth of my finger. I never can eat; I don't know what is to become of me, as I was telling Mrs. Pirn no later back than one o'clock."

"You must try," answered her daughter; and she left the sitting-room and passed into the kitchen, where Ruth was washing the flour off her hands while the soda-bread was rising to a satisfactory thickness as it baked upon the girdle suspended from a crook over the fire.

"I want to make mamma some tea, Ruth; and have we got a new-laid egg?"

"The eggs could not be fresher, Miss Berna; and the mistress can't be off liking the cake. I'll set the tray in a minute."

"You need not take in a cup for me, nurse; I do not want any tea;" and Berna leaned her head against the chimney-piece and looked into the glowing depths of a clear turf fire.

Ruth paused in her occupation to survey the girl. She had nursed her; she loved her. She knew—who that lived in the same house could help knowing?—the daily, hourly fret Mrs. Boyle was to her. The old servant possessed that subtle sympathy and quick tact which is the birthright of

the Irish, and, without asking a question as to what had gone wrong, remarked,

“If your head is bad, Miss Berna, why don’t you go for a turn in the meadow, instead of standing in this hot kitchen? I’ll take in the mistress’s tea, and tell her where you are.”

“Thank you, Ruth; I will go into the meadow. I need not put on a bonnet. I shall not meet any one out there.”

The meadow thus referred to—which belonged to Mr. Muir, being a portion of Kilmoon Farm—lay at the rear of Clear Stream Cottage, and could be entered from the garden of that house through a low rustic gate made of green unbarked fir.

Just as she was, without shawl or bonnet, in her sad, black dress, adorned by nothing save youth and beauty, Berna passed in the calm evening light on to the grass, which had again been cropped almost as close by the cattle as a couple of months previously by the mowers. There was a delicious crispness in the air; soft and peaceful the tender rural landscape lay spread before her. What an exquisite world it was! How fair the heights of Gilnakirk in the near distance looked, with the corn-stooks clustered thick upon them! It was a rich happy country that met her gaze—blessed by God, well cultivated by man. For such as Berna, the face of Nature wears a smile everywhere; and as she walked the girl’s heart grew lighter, and hope whispered life was not yet over, and that while life remains something of happiness may still be in store for the saddest soul that ever carried its burden of sorrow in silent anguish.

For a long time she paced slowly up and down the field. She knew exactly what was passing indoors. Mrs. Boyle sat taking her tea, and at the same time discoursing to Ruth concerning the splendour of Mr. Pirn’s house, mingling her descriptions with such questions and exclamations as—“Will you ever forget her old aunt?” and “I wonder what my father would say if he knew the Pirns had grown too big to care to keep company with Mrs. Boyle, of Boyle Court?”

She would not be missed, and even if she were, Ruth, dear old Ruth, the only person able to manage her mother, could make things straight for her.

For the time she felt free to let her mind wander over the past and the future—over the beautiful mournful past, and the future still shrouded amid the vague romantic mists in which, for the young, Time cunningly enfolds coming events. What did she see written on the clouds, dyed with the gorgeous tints left behind by the departed sun? Heaven only knows, save that it was some tender poem—some sweet unreality which caused her lips to part, and her eyes to grow larger, and their depths to deepen, and brought her lingering footsteps to a standstill, because she would not disturb the illusion with movement.

The glorious tints faded gently out of the sky. Twilight stole softly on, the distant landscape stole imperceptibly out of sight, a slight wind stirred the trees in the hedgerow, yet Berna stood motionless, till suddenly, with a little cry of affrighted surprise, she sprang backward.

A great black horse, which in the dark looked higher and bigger than was actually the case, with a man on its back, who seemed scarcely less startled than herself, had shied suddenly at sight of the girl, and, though a hand of iron was on the bridle, went on plunging violently. She had not heard the sound of coming hoofs, and at that hour, in that lonely place, in that mysterious light, horse and rider loomed on her through the semi-darkness with the effect of an apparition.

"I have frightened you," said the man, at last succeeding in quieting his horse, coming close up to where she stood.

"Not much," answered the girl, though she felt as if her heart were in her mouth.

"I am very sorry, indeed," he proceeded, trying to get a nearer glimpse of this extraordinary person who, bare-headed and all alone, was wandering through the quiet fields at such an hour. "I did not expect to meet any one here."

"Nor I," she murmured apologetically.

"It is late for you to be out. May I not see you safe home?" and he drew his feet out of the stirrups as if with the intention of dismounting.

"O, no, no, thank you!" exclaimed Berna. "I have only a few steps to go. Good-evening!"

He did not answer. He only took off his hat, thrust his feet again into the stirrups, watched her till she passed out of his sight, and then, wheeling his horse round, rode back into the lane whence he had come, and started at a sharp trot for Ardilaw.

As Berna reëntered the cottage she heard her mother's voice still in full progress. Ruth stood just within the parlour door, the tea-things had not been removed, Mrs. Boyle's bonnet and cloak lay on a chair, as she had thrown them off, and Mrs. Boyle herself was giving nurse a vivid description of Richard Vince's interview with the lady he now called wife.

At sight of Berna the widow's words froze on her tongue. The "says hes" and "says shes" of a familiar long ago—when Ruth used to come in and help with the Vince sewing, and Ulick Boyle and Boyle Court were still perfectly unknown quantities—never flowed quite glibly off Mrs. Boyle's lips when her daughter was of the company.

But the widow was seldom what she called "taken at a short," and, stopped in the midst of her own exciting narration, it did not take her a moment to change the front of battle, and, attacking Berna, carry war into the enemy's country.

"Well, and perhaps you will tell us where you have been," she began, "stopping out for hours, and coming home in the clouds of darkness, looking as if you were bewitched. Just see there, Ruth, wouldn't anybody think she'd seen a ghost? What do you mean by those white cheeks and great eyes—enough to frighten anybody?"

"I have a headache, mamma."

"And haven't I the headache often enough, and the heartache too, for that matter? and yet you never hear me com-

plain. Here have I been forcing myself to eat—eating and drinking when I thought every mouthful would choke me—so that I mightn't be laid up and put to the expense of a doctor—though goodness only knows where we'd get a doctor, in this back-of-the-world place; while you, for all you've a hearty appetite, won't take your meals regular, but just pick a bit at odd times, when you think you will."

"Indeed, indeed—" Berna was beginning, when Ruth interposed,

"You'll have a glass of milk and a piece of hot cake, won't you, Miss Berna? And there's a bright fire in the kitchen; I was out looking at it a minute ago. And if I were you, I would warm myself and get to bed. There's nothing for a headache like sleep."

"Ah! she'll never leave off her languid ways while you're living, Ruth," said Mrs. Boyle. "You encourage her in her laziness. Why, when I was your age," she added, addressing her daughter, "I'd have thought shame to go to bed for a headache. I used to dance my headaches off. If we could get nothing but girls to make up a set, why, we took them for partners; and we'd sing the music in turns; and such screaming and laughing and diversion as we had! Well I mind my father, when he was lying ill up-stairs, rapping on the floor with a stick to know if Bedlam had broken loose. Ah! those were days—when I think of them I'm sure I wonder, as I was saying to Mrs. Pirn only to-day, how I ever came to marry, to have all the spirit crushed out of me, and to rear a daughter more like a mute at a funeral than anything else."

"Don't heed the mistress, Miss Berna dear," entreated her nurse; "your laughing days are all to come."

"Indeed, and I hope I may live to see them," said Mrs. Boyle. "It would be wonderful to hear Berna laughing and making merry like any other girl."

"She'll be merry enough yet," answered Ruth. "Come, Miss Berna dear, and have a bit of hot soda-bread, I've kept it warm beside the fire, and go to your bed. The mistress is

tired, too, though she has such a spirit she won't own to it ; and the sooner she lies down and rests herself the better."

Though Ruth's advice was as good as advice could be, Miss Boyle merely followed it because she wished to avoid discussion, and longed to be alone. The glamour of that sky, brilliant with the trail of glory left behind by the departed sun, had not quite left her. The peace and beauty of the quiet scene, which had filled her soul with rapture, still lingered there in memory ; the dream she had dreamed while gazing with wide-open eyes on the tender softness of the evening light was not for many days to seem wholly an illusion ; while the appearance of that horse and rider in the mystical twilight, so soon to merge into night, imported just the touch of romance into the story so necessary to a nature like Berna's, out of which her mother had nipped every green shoot, every bud of promise, so soon as it ventured to show even the semblance of a leaf.

Poetry and imagination, both starved in actual life, struck deeper and stronger roots for the reason they could only seek for nourishment in the girl's own heart. She had her friends, though Mrs. Boyle knew none of them ; from out the pages of the past they came and comforted her. Knights and ladies, gentle maidens, noble heroines, loyal men, human beings sorely tempted, hard beset ; people who suffered and triumphed, who rejoiced, and who, when the worst came to the worst, knew how to die.

Poor in this world's goods—a mere cipher in the estimation of her fellows—God had given her a kingdom better than houses, or gold, or land ; boundary it knew none, save the limits of right and honour ; in it women were all fair and virtuous, and men great and noble and chivalrous ; flowers never faded there, sorrow never entered. It was in the mysterious land through which poets wander at will and romancers dwell ; where wrong is set right, and truth triumphs, and beauty is cherished, and youth tenderly cared for, that Berna Boyle so often sought refuge when her mother wounded her pride and

lashed her temper, and trampled everything which seemed to the girl worth having level with the dust.

She did not say a word to any one concerning the apparition she had seen in Mr. Muir's meadow. Close to herself she kept the memory of that voice, soft with the tones of the melting south. She could not bear the story to become a topic of common conversation, to hear wonder expressed on the subject, and a thousand conjectures hazarded as to who the stranger might be.

From a gauger to an Earl—she knew her mother was capable of running the gamut on such a theme; and the stronger her own curiosity grew the more determinedly she resolved to refrain from endeavouring to gratify it.

And certainly as the days of that week went by she had ample cause for curiosity.

Three, sometimes five, times between breakfast and tea she saw that horse and rider pass along the lane; and the rider never once passed without looking wistfully over the hedge in search of something beside the autumn flowers and the babbling stream that still went singing the same song—only louder—it had with such laughing delight flowed merrily to in the golden summer time.

He was looking for *her*. Berna knew that as well as though she had possessed the experience of half a dozen London seasons. It was a knowledge which kept her out of the garden, and caused her to refrain from those long walks in which, when her mother was too tired to go out, she had been in the habit of indulging; but it did not prevent her from stealing unobserved glances at the handsome audacious stranger, or marvelling who he could be, and with whom he was staying in the neighbourhood.

At last her resolve gave way, and on the Saturday evening following their meeting, while Mrs. Boyle was indulging in one of those naps, she “dropped off” into “merely to save lighting a candle,” Berna, looking into the peat fire over which hung the eternal girdle with a batch of potato-cake “soak-

ing," as Ruth expressed the process of gradual baking necessary to insure the bread being perfectly "done," asked,

"Have you seen a strange gentleman riding a black horse, nurse, pass here several times lately?"

Nurse paused in her operations for a moment before she answered,

"I can't say that I have, Miss Berna. What like was he?"

"Very dark, good-looking; handsome, indeed. He wears no whiskers, only a moustache, has brown eyes, and rides *splendidly*."

"O!" said Ruth grimly. "Has the horse no hair of white about it except a small star on its forehead, and has it got a headband worked with beads instead of leather?"

"Yes, that is the horse; do you know who the gentleman is?"

"He is not a gentleman—he is no one for you to be taking notice of or thinking about."

"I have not been taking notice of him," replied the girl, indignantly refuting the first accusation, but maintaining a wise silence with regard to the second. "Still, I certainly should like to know where he comes from."

"He does not come from very far," was the answer; "and it's like his impudence staring over this place as I've seen him do."

"Why, who in the world is he, nurse?"

"He's just Mr. Muir's son—who else would he be?—and a worse man than his father, so the story goes. They say he was sent home in disgrace by the uncle that reared him. That's neither here nor there, though. Whatever he is, and whatever he has done, you must not be troubling your head about him. There's not a Boyle belonging to you but would turn in their graves if they thought you would take up with such as him. If he comes prowling about here much longer, please or displease, I'll give him a piece of my mind he won't like."

"Not on my account, nurse," said Berna, with an uplifting

of her head nurse had been well acquainted with since she was a mere child ; " I would not have my name brought into such a matter for the world."

" That's right, dear. It's not right for the like of you to waste a thought on the like of him."

" I was only curious, nurse ; and I am curious no longer."

Nevertheless, Berna sighed as she walked out into the darkness and stood for a minute beside the stream.

After all, it is hard to have an illusion shattered ; and it seemed a great humiliation to Ulick Boyle's daughter to see her dream knight vanish away and take the shape of Mr. Muir's son.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL told, the congregation in Dundonald Church, even on those gala days and high festivals when the parish put its best foot foremost to do honour to Easter and Christmas, or to welcome the few notable divines who on rare occasions lost their way thither, never amounted to more than fifty souls. From that number it dwindled, according to the state of the weather and the physical and religious condition of the public, down to, say, half-a-dozen. There were always the Rector, a good easy-going old clergyman, whom it certainly could not, as Miss Muir truly said, do anybody any harm to go and listen to; the clerk, who struck the note with a pitch-key always too high, who always sang wrong, and who thought he knew a great deal more than Mr. Crommles; the sexton, who stoked a huge stove set in the middle of the church, who inducted the parishioners into their pews, tolled the bell at intervals in the porch, where he exchanged cordial greetings with his friends, and who was sure he knew more than Mr. Crommles and the clerk put together; the Rector's churchwarden, who wanted to see fair play about the few halfpence collected every Sunday, which halfpence were divided, after service, between two old women representing the poor of the parish; and a certain magistrate, who always attended divine worship, "hail or shine." The church, as has been previously mentioned, was "set on a hill." It could not be considered old in 1850, having replaced one that had been burned down a few years previously, which fact was not certainly to be regarded as a miracle; the only miracle seemed that it failed to burn every Sunday during the winter months. The pews around the stove were usually as scorchingly hot as pews can ever be without flaring into flame. It was a deliciously warm church. Even Dissenters, driven to

the top of the hill either by choice or necessity, felt there was a good deal of comfort about THE ESTABLISHMENT, as they called that form of worship watched over by Victoria by the Grace of God; and were certainly of opinion, as they walked demurely home, that, if they got no rousing doctrine, they had received the benefit of a capital fire. There was a tower to the church, and in the graveyard a monument which looked higher than the tower, whether it was or not. With bated breath the inhabitants used to tell the story of that monument, and how it cost a matter of over three hundred pounds!

Dear, simple, primitive village: could there ever on earth have been a more delightful place for one, world-tired and weary, to pause for a moment and take breath?

On the ascent of the funny little hill, not so high as the church, as befitted its degree, or so low as the village, likewise the correct position, stood the Meeting-House, approved of by the inhabitants, and supported by that Act passed by William of Orange, as a matter of gratitude to the Presbyterians of the Black North. It was that pious individual's *Regium Donum* which kept the minister to a certain degree independent of his hard-mouthed congregation and enabled him to maintain a decent roof over his head. Not that there was any lack of a congregation there. The Meeting-House swept in the bone and sinew of the country-side. When nineteen-twentieths of a population are Presbyterians and the odd twentieth consists of Dissenters of other denominations—Roman Catholics and outside sinners who loaf about and go nowhere—it is clear that the "Church minister" cannot expect a large audience.

Mr. Crommles had no expectations of the sort. If he had he would have been disappointed. As he was a person who loved his ease, perhaps the last thing he desired was an overflowing congregation, involving visiting. He was what the Dissenters called a "moderate sort of man," holding no strong opinions except on the vexed subject of tithes, fond of digging his own glebe-land, and as ready to exchange cordial good-mornings with the rankest Dissenter as the staunchest upholder

of Church and State—with the wife of a labourer as “The Marchioness” when the blessing and privilege of greeting that lady came in his way.

Such as the Church was, and such as the Rector was, however, Berna Boyle loved both. Though Kilmoon Farm contributed its modest quota to the clergyman's income, the lapse of long years had wiped the Kilmoon pew off the wardens' books; and it was only “out of compliment,” so Mrs. Boyle declared, a fitting position was allotted to her close to the grandees of the neighbourhood.

“We are next but one to the square pews,” she said. “I suppose the old man wasn't able to do any better for us!”

Whatever else she left undone, the widow attended church regularly. In her heart she felt she should have preferred going to Meeting, on account of the larger congregation, and also because of the less stiffness and greater friendliness which there obtained; but in this imperfect world people cannot combine every advantage, and Mrs. Boyle, wishing to be “genteel,” was forced to forego the delights attaching to Dissent.

The widow believed that in her deep mourning, with her sharp, small, washed-out face, she was the observed of all observers; and when she clasped her prayer-book, where the metrical version of the Psalms held its honoured place, she felt as a celebrated singer may do when closing her music and bowing grateful acknowledgments to an appreciative audience. As a rule, there was not much variety to be met with in the little church. Strangers came that way seldom, and when they did chance to come, rarely stopped long in the neighbourhood; so it was certainly with no expectation of novelty or of “seeing any living creature worth seeing” that Mrs. Boyle carefully pinned her crape bows on the Sunday morning following her visit to Mrs. Pirn.

“I am sick and tired of the place,” she said to her daughter as they walked through the village in a silence only broken by the clang-clang of the church bell. “As Matilda Sheill says, it's not the sort of thing I ever expected to have come down

to. If I wasn't the most cheerful and contented woman in the world I'd have drowned myself long ago."

"We might be much worse off," ventured Berna.

"I don't very well see how; not unless we were on the parish, and had to break stones on the road. And such a church! Never even a new bonnet to be seen in it. That's Mr. Garnsey just turning up the Church Road. I wonder how it is the daughter's not with him to-day. She seldom misses showing herself, though, goodness knows, she's not much of a show. Come on, Berna, we'll be late. Ah, just what I thought, there's the last tinkle of the bell!"

They were not very late, however. Mr. Crommles was only walking across to the reading-desk as mother and daughter entered the church, and they were devoutly kneeling when he began "When the wicked man"—a statement the worthy clergyman always unconsciously emphasised by looking hard at Mr. Garnsey, who, if popular rumour could be relied on as correct, had still very little chance of "saving his soul alive."

It was while the Rector was reading the Exhortation that a young man entered the church and stood waiting, with a not ungraceful shyness, in expectation of being shown to a seat. There were but two aisles in the church, and all the pews were situated between them. The young man, either by choice or design, elected to wait in that aisle farthest from where Mrs. Boyle was standing, the admired of all admirers. Just for a moment the sexton failed to see the new-comer, then he hurried towards him, and was about placing this unexpected worshipper quite at the rear of the building, when suddenly Mr. Garnsey's pew-door flew open, and that gentleman made a sign for the fresh arrival to come up higher.

It might all be strictly Biblical; the sexton had nothing to say against that when discussing matters afterwards, but he felt greatly exercised in his mind nevertheless.

"Lyle Garnsey," he remarked in *The Stag*, for those to hear who pleased, "has no doubt a right to ask any man he likes to sit down with him at his own table, but I deny he has any right

to throw our church all into confusion by interfering with my province, and beckoning the son of Hewson Muir to sit among the first in the county. Young Gorman had no call to come to church, anyway. Why couldn't he have stopped below and listened to what was going on in the Meeting? Set him up, indeed, putting his silver shilling in the box like any gentleman."

Which was all hard on Mr. Gorman Muir, who certainly had not put himself forward, and who looked much more like a gentleman than even Lyle Garnsey himself. All through the service he listened with apparently devout attention to every word which fell from Mr. Crommles' lips. He had a rich mellow voice, and joined in the music, greatly to the disgust of the clerk, who tried to drown his tones. Without thought of ostentation, he dropped his "silver shilling" into the poor-box, and when the sermon began, crossed his arms and turned a rapt gaze upon the Rector, who preached a sermon which had done loyal duty on many a previous occasion.

No man could outwardly have behaved better than Mr. Muir junior, and it was not his fault if the attention of all in the church was diverted by his presence from the original purpose which had brought them out.

As for Berna, she kept her eyes fixed on her prayer-book, on Mr. Crommles, on the clerk, on the trees clad in their glorious autumn foliage which she could see through the window close at hand, on anything rather than the man in Mr. Garnsey's pew, who had frightened her much less when he loomed through the darkness of that remembered night than now, when, in the face of day, he came to the last place she ever expected to see him.

As she and her mother walked homeward she did not say one word. Almost in an agony she waited to hear what comment would be made upon his appearance in church.

They were opposite the police barrack before Mrs. Boyle spoke; then, turning to Berna with a pleased and conscious simper, she asked,

"You don't see any spot or anything on my face, dear, do you?"

"No," answered the girl, "not any."

"And is my bonnet on right?"

"Quite right."

"*Then what that strange gentleman found to stare at is a mystery to me!*"

CHAPTER XV.

ALL the way to Clear Stream Cottage—and the way was long—Mrs. Boyle's discourse ran a turbulent and excited stream on the stranger who had appeared in church. Her talk consisted of a series of ejaculations and questions. "It was many a long day" since she had seen so handsome a man—his eyes seemed to "pierce her through." "Did you ever behold their equal?" she asked her daughter.

"I did not look at him, mamma," answered Berna.

"Well, I'm not finding any fault with you for that," said Mrs. Boyle. "It's as well even for so young a girl as you are to keep her eyes to herself. Still, it's a pity you did not just take a glance. I wonder who he can be? Some grandee, I shouldn't be a bit surprised! I never did see anything like the way that Mr. Garnsey puts himself forward—throwing wide the door just as if the whole church belonged to him."

"His pew does, I suppose," ventured the girl.

"I don't think it. Beechfield can't be in the parish; and it's a burning shame he should have a square seat, and better people than he ever came of forced to put up with the box we are shut into. Ah, one of these days I'll have a few words to say to Mr. Garnsey he won't like; and I'll not forget to mention that square pew when I am about it!"

"Why, how has Mr. Garnsey offended you, mamma?" asked Berna.

"By his ungentlemanliness, if you must know. He nearly rode over me a while ago, and when I spoke to him about it he asked me why I did not keep out of the road; as if the road wasn't as much mine as his."

Berna did not answer; she must indeed have been dense

had she failed ere that moment to understand most of her mother's little tricks.

"I never saw more shapely hands on a man," said Mrs. Boyle, recurring to the hero question. "Mr. Garnsey's looked coarse beside them. I'll warrant those hands have never done any hard work ; and O, the beautiful diamond ring he wore on his little finger, flashing and glittering till it fairly dazzled me. I wish I knew who he was. I am afraid old Mr. Crommles will be no wiser than myself!"

Like the single line of epitaph which could be read a hundred and forty-four different ways, Mrs. Boyle contrived out of one man's appearance to ring the changes for two Irish miles, and when she reached home the subject seemed as far from being exhausted as ever.

"Have you heard about the handsome stranger we had to-day in church, Ruth?" she asked, when that elderly hand-maiden came in to lay the cloth. "He was a proper sort of man. Did you tell nurse about the way he stared me out of countenance, Berna?"

"No, mamma," murmured the girl; and one swift glance at her downcast face told Ruth who the stranger was.

"Anybody might think," said Mrs. Boyle, addressing her daughter, "we were seeing strangers every day, for all you seem to think or care about them. I declare I did not know which way to look. His eyes seemed to be in every place at once. I couldn't lift mine without meeting his full. I wonder he wasn't ashamed of himself, and in church, too. As I was telling this girl coming along, it's not often we see anything like him. Mr. Garnsey, of course, put himself forward, setting the pew-door wide, as if there wasn't another seat—quite empty seats where he'd have been far more at home than where he was. I do wish you could have seen him, Ruth—coal-black hair, not curly, but with just a wave in it; bright dark eyes; a skin like a gipsy's, only clearer; and a ring you wouldn't match in any jeweller's in Belfast. I don't know that I ever saw his equal; and there are fine men, and plenty, to be met

any afternoon in Sackville Street. I wonder who in all the wide world he can be. I would like well to know where he comes from."

"Should you, mem? I think I could tell you," said Ruth.

"That's a good joke; and you never set eyes on him in your life."

"I'm not so sure of that, mem. By your description of him, if he's not Mr. Muir's son, he might be that son's twin brother; and a pretty sort of a character he is, if we're to believe all the tales that are told about him."

"But he can't be Mr. Muir's son!" exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. "Berna, you know he can't."

"How should I know, mamma?"

"You're quite right, Miss Berna," said Ruth; "how should *you* know anything about Mr. Muir's son? It's not very likely. For all his good looks, I'm told he's as wild a lot as ever went headlong to destruction. His old uncle took and reared him, and gave him the best of training and of schooling—paid his expenses at the college in Dublin, and meant to start him as a gentleman; but he couldn't do it. The bad blood came out, and he was forced to turn him out of doors for his ill-behaviour. And now he's no better than a common jockey, going about to fairs and markets, and consorting with all sorts of characters but respectable. Mr. Garnsey ought to think shame of himself, having the young man at Beechfield. To be sure, Mr. Garnsey's not much to boast of in the way of respectability; but he should think of his motherless daughter. People are laughing already, and saying Gorman Muir has as keen an eye for money as ever his father had."

Having finished which criminating sentence, Ruth placed the spoons and knives and forks on the table with great energy, and retired from the field, where Mrs. Boyle remained for a moment stricken dumb.

"Did you ever hear, Miss Berna," asked Ruth that night, as she was brushing the girl's long hair with tenderly caressing hand, "how Mr. Muir fell in with his first wife, and money to

start him in his farm? And he has got on past the common; for when he came first to these parts he never thought to live at Ardilaw."

No. Berna had not heard anything about Mr. Muir's antecedents.

"Well, it seems that there was up in the county Donegal a young lady, motherless, like Miss Garnsey, but more lonely still, because her father was married for the second time, and spent all his time in England with his grand wife and the sons she bore him."

"Yes, nurse; and the young lady—"

"She couldn't have been much account," went on Ruth, "or she never could have so far forgot herself as to talk like an equal to one such as Hewson Muir, the son of her father's bailiff. Don't you think that yourself, Miss Berna?"

"Indeed I do," answered the girl. Her face was half hidden by a veil of hair; but in the glass Ruth could see it flush crimson as she spoke.

"Well," resumed the woman, "by what I can understand, this went on for a long time, till at last he persuaded her to marry him, making sure she would have her mother's fortune. Instead of that, not a penny of it came to her, and you may be sure that was a fine disappointment to young Muir."

"You mean Mr. Muir, our landlord—"

"Of course I do; he was young once; he was far younger than his son is now when he got so far over the poor girl as to induce her to do such a thing as marry him—the wicked wretch that he was. However, the secret was kept for a while; but it leaked out in time, and Mr. Gorman—that was the father's name—came over from London and turned his daughter out of doors, and wouldn't forgive her, though she begged and prayed him to do so on her bended knees."

"Ah!" exclaimed Berna, with a little gasp.

"I don't say it was right," said Ruth; "for, after all, no matter how far wrong she had gone, she was still his own flesh and blood; but still it must have been hard for one like Mr. Gorman to find his child had so demeaned herself. Any-

way, he wouldn't forgive her, and Muir found himself married, and his father discharged from his situation, and little between them all and beggary."

"What did he do?" asked Ruth's auditor.

"He took a cottage in the neighbourhood and laid himself out to annoy his father-in-law. You may be sure the Gormans didn't like the notion of having Mr. Muir settling down at their very gates. So the family lawyer was taken into counsel; and they proposed among them that if the pair would go away to Australia they should have something to begin the world out there on."

"How was it they did not go?"

"He agreed to go. The lawyer paid the passage-money, and never gave Muir the amount they promised till he was on board the vessel. Then he managed somehow to give them the slip, and the first thing they heard from him was that he had taken this farm, that his wife had a son, and that she was dying. She couldn't stand the life, poor thing! She had been delicately nurtured—never knew what it was to put her hand to anything, or do a turn for herself. Then his father and mother lived with them: and it must have been cruel work for one reared as she was. They say she died of a broken heart. She made one appeal to Mr. Gorman for the boy; but he'd have nothing to do with him or her. She just dwined away and died. The person that told me said she wasn't heavier nor a child when they lifted her into her coffin. Her mother's brother, Mr. Trevasson, shamed Mr. Gorman into having her buried among her own people; but I don't know that did her much good. He had just come home from abroad, and he took the boy and brought him up like his own son, and they say he'd have done well by him, and left him money at his death, only the cloven foot peeped out. This young man's worse nor his father ever was, I understand—a wild reckless devil—God forgive me for calling one of His creatures such a name; and O, Miss Berna, my dear, have a care, and remember you've no father living to look after you, and the mistress, in a manner of speaking, wants to be looked after

herself; and though it's no use crying over spilt milk, why did you ever refuse the old lady's offer to go and live with her in honour and comfort? I can't bear to think of all you threw away, and just for nothing. You see yourself the mistress could content herself better among those she was used to once than if she had a choice of the first in the land."

Berna did not answer for a moment. Slowly and thoughtfully she drew a strand of her hair through her fingers, before she said,

"If it had to be done over again, nurse, I should still say I would never leave mamma."

"Well, dear, it's a pity, that's all. You'll have to be wonderful wise to keep yourself to yourself, if you don't want to get into trouble. It is a wicked world, and besides—"

"Are you going to talk all night?" asked Mrs. Boyle, entering the room; "and do you put up your hair, Berna. Anybody would think it was something wonderful, to see how fond you are of sitting with it all streaming down your back."

"Nurse was telling me about Mr. Muir's first wife, mamma," said Berna, gathering her obnoxious tresses together and coiling them round her head.

"Nurse might find something better to do than stand repeating idle gossip—on a Sunday, too," retorted Mrs. Boyle, with a good deal of acrimony. "For my part, there is nothing in the world I think so ill of as evil speaking and backbiting. It would be a great deal more fitting for nurse to sit down and read her Bible than to stand there encouraging you in vanity, and telling stories that likely have not a word of truth in them."

"It is gospel truth, mem, that a lady married Mr. Muir, and never rued doing so but once," replied nurse stoutly.

"We should but speak about people as we find them," persisted Mrs. Boyle; "and I can only say I consider Mr. Muir a most obliging and agreeable person."

"Well, mem," said Ruth, with the familiar freedom of an old servant, "each one to her taste. I only know Mr. Muir wouldn't be mine."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE equinoctial gales had swept over Ardilaw ; all the flowers, fuchsias, marigolds, dahlias, and hollyhocks, which during the autumn made even Mr. Muir's neglected garden one mass of colour and beauty, were lying sodden and dead, awaiting the great "redding up," which only took place when nothing else about the farm required attention. Brown and yellow leaves littered the lawn and the meadows lying beside the stream. On the apple-trees there still remained a few russets Miss Muir was letting "hang" while the dried-up stalks would bear their weight. The hay and corn had long been carted into the yard and built into great stacks, where already a colony of mice and rats were snugly ensconced in winter quarters. The potatoes were all stored in the spacious outhouses, not "clamped," as is the English custom. Not a thing was in the fields, save mangolds and swedes. A pause had ensued in country life ; and under the gleams of a watery sun in late October the rural landscape looked strangely still and lonely.

Even at Beechfield, not a scrap of mignonette or bit of heliotrope remained to greet the passer-by with a whiff of the departed summer. In the greenhouses there was little to be seen but chrysanthemums. Nature seemed taking a rest before covering her head and disappearing from sight under the snows of December and the frosts which so bless the earth when they come early in the year.

One fine morning, not three months after that day when he came across the hayfield, leading his horse by the bridle, Gorman Muir and his father walked slowly up the hill leading to Craigantlet. They had paced the length of the back avenue at Ardilaw, and wandered out into the Bangor Road more for

the convenience of uninterrupted conversation than with any idea of exercise.

Very early the younger man had, according to his wont, gone down to the post-office for his letters, and it so chanced that he brought one back with him which Mr. Muir imagined might change all his plans.

It was from Mr. Trevasson's solicitors, enclosing the long-deferred order for one thousand pounds. Gorman had expected this order for such a period that he at length relinquished all hope of getting it; then, in a moment, as so often happens, when the matter was well-nigh forgotten, fortune came to him in the guise of a lawyer's letter. Since its arrival he had been very quiet and thoughtful, and Mr. Muir felt he could know no rest till he heard what his son meant to do.

"Now you've got the money," he said, "I suppose you'll be for leaving us."

Gorman looked at him, and hesitated a moment before he answered,

"I'm not so sure of that!"

"Why, I've heard you say a score times, if you'd the means, you would start for the wild West within a week."

"Yes; but you see I had not the money then. Now that I have got it, I shall think twice before I leave Ireland."

"What! Do you mean that you'll stop on *here*?"

"Is there any reason why I should not?"

"No; no reason at all in the world; only I thought you were not just content."

"I was not; but I am growing more and more content every day. Money, as you have often told me, makes more; and I fail to see why, with this thousand pounds, I should not do a great deal of good for myself."

"That you might, man—that you might. And so you really have made up your mind to stick to the old county of Down, instead of rushing off to a country where you know nobody, and where, as far as I can tell, nobody particularly wants you?"

"That is precisely my intention," said his son; "if the county of Down will stick to me, I will stick to the county of Down. I have come round to your opinion that there is gold to be dug out of the earth here, without crossing the ocean to find a mine in America."

"I am sure and certain that there is," answered Mr. Muir.

"And I want to make a lot of money."

"And some day, perhaps, you'll be thinking of marrying?"

"Some day. Yes; no doubt; but not till I grow a good deal richer than I am."

"Maybe if you make up to the right woman you mightn't require to be so rich, after all."

"I should never like to be dependent on my wife."

"Well, I don't say that might be exactly necessary either," said Mr. Muir, laughing in his sleeve at the thought of how matters were taking the course he desired. "It is early days to be considering that part of the business, and I'm heart glad to find you've no thought of leaving us all. I was afraid when that letter came you'd be for packing and starting off at once."

"No," replied Gorman. "I will not go—yet, at any rate."

"I hope you'll never go at all—I'd miss you now as I never thought to miss anybody"—and there ensued a moment's silence; while Mr. Muir turned his head in the direction of Scrabo to conceal an emotion of which, perhaps, he felt ashamed, and Gorman looked steadily up the hill, feeling also ashamed of himself, though from a perfectly different reason.

It was Gorman who spoke first.

"Then I may remain at Ardilaw?" he said.

"Where else would you stay but in your father's house till you have a house of your own?" retorted Mr. Muir.

"If I stop, as I shall stop, since you are so kind, I do not think it would be right—"

"Speak out! What's on your mind? What is it you think would not be right?"

"Now that I have money and am in the way of making money to remain a burden on you."

"What sort of a burden?"

"Well, my keep must cost something. I do not profess to be able to live on air—and—"

"You want to pay me for your board, I suppose. Now let one word serve: put that notion out of your head. Child of mine shall never give me money for his bite and sup. When I can't afford to bid those welcome I brought into the world, I hope I'll be nearly out of it. Besides, about a house like this, what do you think the keep of one more can signify? It's not like as if we'd to go to market for the things we need; and we make no stranger of you. Just what we're used to ourselves we set before you, so never speak a sentence of that sort again. When you are any charge to me I have the use of my tongue, and can tell you, don't be a bit afraid."

"Thank you! I'm sure you are very generous."

"Generous! Nobody ever accused me before of being that, and I am very sure nobody will again. I'd be sorry, though, to act like old Mrs. Monro, who, after asking her son and her son's wife and the child and its nurse on a visit, quarrelled with them, and brought in a bill for six weeks' board and lodging. Faith! and she got it, too, for she processed them at the court."

"Well, if ever you repent, you won't have to process me, for I will pay without a murmur," laughed Gorman; "but there is something I want you to give me leave to have and pay the expense of."

"And that is?"

"I should like a corner to myself, where you and I could talk over any matter we wanted to discuss without the chance of being interrupted. Now if I might furnish that room opposite to where we sit, and call it my own while I stop at Ardilaw, I should be very glad indeed."

Instantly that deep dull red which always gave the idea he must have received some heavy sudden blow overspread Mr.

Muir's face, and though he struggled to answer calmly he could not command his voice, and was forced to keep silence.

"I am sorry," exclaimed his son. "I would not have said a word had I thought it could vex you. It was thoughtless of me. I will never mention a thing of the sort again."

"Wait a minute; don't be in such a hurry," entreated Mr. Muir with a mighty effort, temporarily strangling the demon of pride that had been choking him. "Between father and son there ought to be no huff taken when no offence was meant. You did put me out for a bit, I'll not deny; but that's all over now. You're quite right; the house is not what you've been used to. I felt how it would be before you came here; but I never thought you would find as little fault as you have done. In the first blush of it, though, if you consider, no man likes to be told his house, or his horse, or his furniture, or his manners might be mended; and I suppose I'm just as great a fool as my neighbours in that particular. But mind, Gorman, I'm not such a fool as to expect what contented me to content you; and there was a time once when I'd have liked well to gather handsome things about me, and hold my head higher it may be than I'd any right to hold it; but I was forced to give up that notion, as many another has had to forego his notion. When I first took possession of Kilmoon Farm, after paying for the tenant-right and a few odd things about the premises—all the best had been auctioned off—I found myself with a trifle over two hundred and eighty pounds to get cattle and implements and necessary furniture. You know it is reckoned the least any man can stock a farm with is ten pounds to the acre; so you can cast that out at your leisure. I had my father and mother to keep; and I've buried three wives, and spent a small fortune in doctor's bills; and the girls have all had some sort of education; and I don't owe one in the world sixpence, except the rent that'll be due to Mr. Garnsey next gale-day, and that's lying ready for him in the bank. I don't know how it has been done, upon my conscience, I don't;" and Mr. Muir, overwhelmed with the remembrances of struggle which

lay behind and the evidences of success spread around, paused in his vehement recital as though he had been suddenly struck with lightning.

"It certainly seems very wonderful," agreed Gorman, with hearty warmth.

"But I have run far away from what we started talking about," said Mr. Muir, taking himself well in hand like a horse inclined to bolt. "Do what you please with that room where the grand ladies used to sit, as I've heard, with their hoops, and their hair powdered, playing the harpsichord and spinet, and working their sofa cushions, and suchlike, just as other ladies do to-day, only with a different sort of wool. Many's the time I've felt vexed myself to see it turned to no better use than a store for seed corn and beans and peas. There's not much doing now, so I'll tell Ned to begin and clear everything out, and after dinner I'll break the news to Bell, who'll, maybe, not be best pleased. She has a wonderful temper of her own, Bell, and I'm not just so fond of crossing it."

"If you think my having the room will put her out we had better think no more about it. We ought not to cross Bell—she is such a capital manager."

"Sometimes it strikes me she is a bit too much of a manager. I've often lately had my doubts about the butter."

"About the—" suggested Mr. Gorman Muir, dumfounded.

"About the butter—don't I speak plain enough?—you see it's a serious matter: she has the whole management of the dairy, and though we have more cows than we used, I don't find that the quantity we sell increases as it ought."

"But Bell wouldn't do a thing like that," remonstrated the young man.

"Her mother would, at any rate; and there's no use blinking facts: children take after the mother, more's the pity; you're the very 'moral' of yours; Bell is her own mother, as one might say. I can't tell who Sarah strains after—nobody worth talking about, anyhow—while Carline, she has a way of gathering lovers round her just like what *her* mother had.

Bell can't bear anybody to have anything or be made of but herself; and her mother, if she'd heard me remark a girl was pretty, would never have ceased scolding for a week. She was beyond the common jealous, and of me, too!" added Mr. Muir, in righteous astonishment; "while as for Carline's mother, it was I had reason to be jealous of her. She just did it with a look and a trick of the eye, and a little half smile, so faint that you'd have scarce noticed it. No matter who came, he stopped. No matter where we went, she was accounted a sort of saint, she had such pleasant manners and such winning ways; and I swear to you, Gorman, the happiest day of my whole life was the day I saw her a corpse. But I am talking folly and nonsense. What's the use of raking over dead ashes? We'll make a picture of that room yet; but if you take my advice you will just get off to Belfast as soon as you've had your dinner and bank that money; then, when you get home, don't heed a single word Bell says."

"I'll get off, I think, without waiting for any dinner," replied the young man. "The days draw in so soon now I sha'n't have too much time in town."

"It might be just as well," agreed Mr. Muir, who preferred, when war seemed impending between himself and Bell, that the combat should be got over in private. "Go in and brush yourself a bit. The horse'll be ready by the time you are. Ned shall have him for you at the front door."

With the cold sunlight falling upon him through the leafless branches, Gorman Muir rode slowly down the avenue, as fine-looking a man, possessed of as untrained a nature as ever, in the old days when might was right, spurred on in tournament or battle. A thousand wild projects floated through his brain; dreams bright and fair deluded him with their false, smiling faces. He would be rich, honoured, courted; he would woo, and win, and wed the only girl he had ever seen he felt he could marry; he would build a great house, and buy a fine estate, and mix on equal terms with the descendants of those who once in hoop and powder held festival at Ardilaw;

he would— But at that point he was recalled to the realities of life.

A small woman, dressed in widow's weeds, with faded blue eyes and a pinkish nose, was fumbling over the latch, trying to open the gate.

"Allow me," said Gorman; and in a trice he was on the ground and holding the gate wide for her to pass through.

"Is Miss Muir within?" she asked with modest trepidation.

Hat in hand, the young man assured her she would find Miss Muir at the house; then, leading his horse through, and closing the gate behind him, Gorman sprang into his saddle, and, satisfied concerning Mrs. Boyle's whereabouts, selected the least traversed road to Belfast, which took him straight past Clear Stream Cottage.

He paused where the rivulet ran under the lane; and, rising in his stirrups, looked over the tiny domain. Not a soul was in sight—the place was utterly still. The very birds had hushed their songs and were quiet. Beside the parlour window Berna sat reading some book which evidently enchaind her interest, for she never moved, though he watched her for some time.

At length, however, the curious influence one human being's scrutiny has over another asserted itself. Suddenly she looked up—saw a familiar face peering at her over the hedge; then, while a vivid blush mounted to her forehead, she closed the book and swiftly left the window, never to sit near it again.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEECHFIELD was a house about three times as large as Ardilaw. Built long generations since, when materials were cheap and labour even cheaper, it possessed all the advantages and disadvantages belonging to the period at which it was erected.

Great rambling rooms, doors opening into unexpected cupboards, and smaller chambers, flung into the ground-plan, apparently out of mere wanton extravagance—narrow corridors, halls within halls, staircases where it seemed superfluous for stairs to be, low ceilings, small windows, yawning fireplaces, mantelpieces almost barbaric in their pillared pomp and lavish expenditure of marble and carving, polished oak floors—a house in which a fortune might readily have been spent by some modern æsthete without producing any appreciable result ; and yet that, with its dark old-fashioned furniture and bald simplicity, presented a certain appearance of proud stateliness many a modern mansion decorated in the highest style of latter-day art halts after in vain.

The house was literally hidden by trees. Though it stood on a slight hill, a view could only be obtained of even the upper windows when the leaves had fallen ; yet from all the living-rooms glimpses were obtainable of soft green hills and white cottages, and a winding stream and verdant meadows, to say nothing of thousands of trees interlacing their branches, of foliage dancing in the sunshine or dripping in the rain—a place any man might have been proud of—a place Lyle Garnsey was proud of, though he permitted moss to cover the avenue, and the lawn to grow like a meadow, till the time came for the mowers to lay the grass into swath, and gather

into cock, after which time cattle were turned out to graze, and the broad expanse might have been supposed an ill-kept park, only it was not one.

Everywhere—on each fence, and pillar, and gate—the story of a straitened income was written.

Absolute poverty had never come as a visitor past the entrance-lodges ; but Mr. Garnsey's income could by no means afford the expense of keeping such a residence in proper order. In the days of his youth he had spent his substance in wild and riotous living ; and every effort he made in latter years to repair his fortunes resulted only in rendering the tale of disaster more complete.

The stories recited, with bated breath, beside humble hearths, over glowing turf fires, concerning the sins of his earlier manhood were, making allowance for some natural exaggeration, true enough. He had been very wicked in act ; and in heart he was very wicked still. Remembered sins were pleasant to him, and he liked to talk to any one willing to listen about days of evil-doing that could come no more. He married an heiress he disliked, for the sake of her wealth ; and he broke the heart of the woman he loved. That page in his life could scarcely have been agreeable reading when, in the night-time, memory brought a lamp and the open book to his bedside, and bade him trace each mournful word which had been written in tears by one whose eyes could never more look at him with tender entreaty or agonised reproach. In every possible relation of life he had failed to do his duty ; yet, so far as man knew, remorse did not often trouble his repose. He lamented that the railway mania should for him have resulted in loss instead of profit ; he chafed because his means did not permit him to live most part of the year out of Ireland ; he felt angry when he saw how business men were able to keep the great places they bought or built ; but he failed to repent him of the wasted years spent in idleness and vice, and to prepare for the long, lonely journey to the land which is so very far off mortal eye cannot discern it, yet so near that

scarcely one second of our mortal time is needed to step from this world across its mysterious frontier.

Mr. Gorman Muir had not exaggerated facts when he spoke with such bitterness concerning the sort of conversation in which Mr. Garnsey delighted.

It was an offence to God and any decent man ; but it had never offended Mr. Muir senior.

Quite the contrary. Mr. Garnsey's tenant revelled in the stories that gentleman recalled ; the tainted atmosphere at Beechfield seemed full of nourishment to him ; duels, and the causes which led to them ; prize-fights, and those who witnessed them ; the account of shameful orgies, and cynical anecdotes, the drift of which went to imply the venality of men and the frailty of women, found in Hewson Muir an auditor far too appreciative and comprehending. It was not so with Gorman. He hated the talk. Whatever was good in his nature revolted from the doctrines held by Mr. Garnsey, and he turned so dull an ear to discourses which had usually for their theme matters only demons might have been supposed interested in, that at length the owner of Beechfield gave up trying to convert him, with the scoffing remark, " You're young yet, though you are old enough to know better. When you have seen something of the world you will think worse of it even than I do."

When a man comes of a good family, and has a fine property, and possesses enough money to keep the wolf from the door, it is not very easy to outrage public opinion, which usually inclines to smile on, rather than frown at, sinners in a respectable rank of life. Nevertheless, this was a feat Mr. Garnsey had managed to perform. One by one his equals dropped out of acquaintance with him. Fathers of families, whatever their own shortcomings might have been, did not care to associate on intimate terms with a man who would persist in insinuating they were even such as himself. Young men found his type of vice old-fashioned and wearisome ; women—even those who wished to be married themselves, or

who possessed daughters they wished to see settled—avoided him when possible, and when not possible waited with dread the next innuendo it might please him to utter in those low, soft, trained notes, which added so much to the awfulness of his conversation. Had he roared his sinful speeches out like old Admiral O'Conegan, who always shouted as if he were trying to make himself heard in a high gale, they would have been robbed of half their terror.

His voice was so stealthy, that his utterances always, even if expected, seemed to come on the listener unawares. Possessed of refined tastes ; a judge of painting and music ; an ardent admirer of beauty in human beings, animals, and nature, with a cultured intellect, critical understanding, superior manners, a gentlemanly appearance, clear-cut features, and a cold heart, he seemed to Gorman Muir as good a representative of the Enemy of Mankind as he was ever likely to meet with in mortal form. He had never felt afraid of any man before ; but he did feel afraid of Mr. Garnsey. Nevertheless, after making a detour which enabled him once again to pass by Clear Stream Cottage, he passed through the gates of Beechfield ere turning his horse's head in the direction of Ardilaw.

When he paused by Clear Stream Cottage the night was fast darkening down, and, dismounting, he slipped in through the rustic gate and across the tiny bridge, and, from behind a little belt of shrubs, stood looking at the shuttered windows which hid from his sight the girl with whom he had fallen so violently in love.

She was playing ; he could hear the tones of an old piano, which sounded to him like the music of the spheres. Cautiously he crept forward, till close on the narrow path which led round the end of the cottage ; there he remained without moving, almost without breathing, listening to the harmony she was making. Suddenly she broke off, and, after a sad sweet modulation, softly struck a few chords, and began to sing.

"O, what a voice !" he thought, with rapture. He did not know the song, and he could not hear the words ; but what he

did know and hear sufficed to keep him happy company to Beechfield.

"Yes, my darling, it is all for your sweet sake," he murmured, as he rode leisurely between the tall laurel hedges that made the approach to Beechfield seem like the entrance to some sylvan prison. The Garnseys had ever been proud of those wonderful laurels, quite twelve feet high, which hemmed in the avenue with thick leafy barriers; but to Gorman they always seemed terrible, excluding, as they did, light, and air, and view. His was a nature which never breathed quite freely except on the hill-top or a wild sea-shore. When the winter winds were howling, and the crested waves dashing madly over the rocks, he could have shouted like a boy with glad excitement. He was of the stuff men are made of who volunteer for forlorn hopes, and first mount the scaling ladder, and rush forward to meet death or victory. As an officer on active service he would have been the right thing in the right place; but he could scarcely be so considered, planted down in a quiet village, where even the echo of war's alarm was scarcely to be heard, situate within a few Irish miles of the largest manufacturing town in Ireland.

Once, with all the veins of his turbulent heart, he desired to enter the Army; but in those days his uncle was far too fond of him to contemplate the idea of separation. Since the rupture, he had often contemplated taking the Queen's shilling, shouldering his bayonet, and marching straight from the ranks to renown. But now all that was over. Success to him meant winning a smile from Berna Boyle; fame, making a home when he could call her all his own; happiness, toiling to provide her with such comfort and luxury as he could compass; heaven on earth, the knowledge nothing could part them but death, which, after all, could not part those for long who were sure to wait, each for the other, beside the river that encircles the golden land.

He had quite made up his mind as he rode into Belfast, and thought matters out while he let his horse walk leisurely

along the lonely lanes he was forced to pass through in order to take Clear Stream Cottage on his way back ; and when he at length sprang to the ground, and stood under the great portico which sheltered Beechfield a little from raging northerly winds, he felt more than ever determined nothing should now divert him from his purpose, that he would follow the melody of that sweet voice till he caught the singer, and caged her beyond the possibility of flight.

"Has Mr. Garnsey finished dinner?" he asked the footman, who always felt distracted in his intercourse with Gorman between the remembrance that the gentleman was Mr. Muir's son and the consciousness of several shillings and half-crowns having passed between them.

"The family have not set down to dinner yet, sir," said William, in a creditable spirit of compromise. "The master—"

"Who is that?" asked the master himself, appearing in the hall at this juncture. "Muir, I declare! Come in, man."

"Not this evening, thank you, as you have not dined. I thought I should about catch you at dessert."

"So you would, only I have been to a place on the other side of Mount Stewart, and only just got back. However, that's all the better. Come along; I'll hear no denial. Hot water shall be taken into my dressing-room. The fish will be up in five minutes, so you had better make haste. Never mind your horse; Ward will see to him. You will find us in the drawing-room."

No man need have desired a more cordial welcome; and though Gorman did not like his host, yet he must have been more or less than Irish had he remained insensible to the warmth of such a reception.

Besides, the house and its appointments were such as he had been accustomed to, and it would be idle to affirm that brotherly love or filial reverence had, so far, served to reconcile him to the domestic arrangements at Ardilaw. Ardent and impressionable as he was in all things, he argued such a

greeting on the occasion of the first step he had as yet adventured towards fortune augured well for ultimate triumph.

With creditable rapidity he washed and brushed; then, hurrying down-stairs, entered the drawing-room—an apartment so long it seemed quite a journey from the door to the spacious hearth, on which glowed a fire of ruddy peat. There was no other light; and a lady, starting up and holding out her hand, said,

“How do you do, Mr. Muir? Don’t tumble over Bruce; he’s lying stretched full length on that rug. I am so glad you have come. I’ll get you to look at poor Weenie’s leg after dinner. She got it broken, poor darling; and I scarcely think Peter Doey has put the splints on right.”

“You are soon enlisted,” remarked Mr. Garnsey, who was standing with his back to the fire. “You have not had time to draw your breath before getting involved in the great dog question. For my own part, I wish not merely all their legs, but all their necks, were broken. Just look here! Six of them; no less. Enough to eat a man out of house and home—Dinner! Please take my daughter, Muir. I will bring up the rear, and keep back as many of these raging fiends as possible.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

OVER the dinner-table none but the most ordinary subjects were discussed. The state of parties in England, the doings of the Encumbered Estates Court, the prospects of the potato crop, the next year's great show in Hyde Park, the mildness of the season, prognostications as to whether there would be much hunting, speculations concerning the future of France, with occasional observations from Miss Garnsey bearing upon some piece of local gossip or the health of a favourite animal, made up the total of a conversation which was neither much better nor much worse than the usual run of talk in the family circle when slightly on its *p*'s and *q*'s.

In fond memory, perhaps, of a time when "dining" meant much to him in the way of wit and wine and company, Mr. Garnsey never failed to array himself in evening-dress before sitting down to table; and as, like a dutiful daughter, Miss Garnsey, often somewhat against her will, followed suit, Mr. Gorman had the blessing of beholding that young lady attired in a costume which was neither a riding-habit nor the severe and uncompromising apparel in which it was her custom to proceed on those errands of mercy that had elicited such admiring encomiums from Mr. Muir.

The dinner itself was very good. Let him stint in what he would without the house, Mr. Garnsey took excellent care there was no lack of comfort within it. He liked to live well, and every dish which came to table was admirably cooked and equally admirably served. No lack of warmth or light, either, in those spacious rooms of glittering silver or sparkling glass. Gorman had dined there before more than once, and always

with the feeling that he had walked back into the sphere from which so recently sentence of banishment was pronounced against him.

Though he did not like his host or care for Miss Garnsey, it seemed pleasant to float back for even an evening amidst the well-remembered appointments, the soft-footed attendants, the dainty dishes, the culture, the refinement, the orderly service of old. It may seem ridiculous, but it is true, that he seemed to himself more worthy of Berna as he sat looking at the shaded lights and the snowy damask, and the delicate china and the massive plate, than when he was thrown among a family who ate their food in haste, and with almost as few accessories in the way of luxury as the Israelites on that night so greatly to be remembered.

He was happy—"fey" almost, to quote a well-known Scotch phrase. He talked gaily; he ate and drank with enjoyment; he laughed; he looked handsomer than ever; he conducted himself—so the butler confided to the footman—as "if he had been a gentleman born;" and assuredly, spite of the knowledge that his father was "just Hewson Muir of Ardilaw," those functionaries found it very difficult to remember he was not every whit as good as their master, who sat at the foot of his table, looking, so the notion occurred to Gorman, as if he had been washed seven times in Jordan, and come up clean as a little child.

Usually there was a something exasperating to the young man between the darkness of Mr. Garnsey's inner nature and the freshness of his complexion; but on the evening in question it would have required more than a clear white brow and guileless blue-gray eyes to disturb his equanimity. Had he not a thousand pounds in the bank—an object in his life—the sound of Berna's voice in his ear? Who could be happier than Gorman Muir, seated in the flesh at Mr. Garnsey's table, and surrounded with everything calculated to gratify his senses, while his mind, off on a journey of its own, was standing in the semi-darkness of a summer's night, which enfolded himself and

the dream-woman of his life in a mantle woven of mystery and silence?

Meals, no matter how long protracted, must end some time; and at length the cloth was drawn, and the dessert, which consisted of nothing specially rich or rare—pears and apples, grown in the Beechfield gardens, and almonds and raisins, provided by the Beechfield family grocer—placed on the table. Before Mr. Garnsey stood two decanters and a carafe of water. Both servants withdrew—all waiting and chance of eavesdropping was at an end—and Gorman could at once have plunged into business had he chosen. But he did not choose. He and Miss Garnsey were engaged in the delightful occupation of seeing if they could discover any double almonds, when Mr. Garnsey asked,

“Why have you thrown us over in church, Muir? Was not our pew as good as that where you sat last Sunday, frying between the stove and the Rector?”

“Better, a great deal; but when Mr. Crommles took so much trouble to give me a whole pew to myself, I could not think of encroaching on your kindness any longer.”

“Cunning old fox! He likes to dot his few sheep about the landscape so as to produce as much effect as possible. I declare I have been to church when all the worshippers did not amount to six persons.”

“Why do we go to church at all?” asked Miss Garnsey, in a speculative sort of way, as she dreamily cracked another almond.

“Because we belong to the upper million, in a so-called Christian country,” replied Mr. Garnsey. “If our lot were cast in any other land we should no doubt follow the fashion there.”

“But you have convictions on the subject, I suppose,” suggested Gorman.

“What kind of convictions do you mean? Religious? Not I, my friend. I left all that sort of thing behind me long ago—as you will leave it in the days to come. We drop a lot

of useless luggage by the way as we travel through life. What I shall never understand is the reason why we are weighted with so much at the beginning of our journey. The best years of our life are spent in disabusing our minds of any number of foolish fables and priestly legends and old women's tales."

"Slightly altering Miss Garnsey's question, I wonder why *you* go to church?"

"Simply because it is well to conform to the religious laws of a country as well as to its civil. On the whole, I find it less trouble to go with the stream than to fight against it—that is, in matters where my own conscience is not materially affected by doing so. If I were in Turkey, I should swear by the Prophet; if in Persia, worship the Sun; as I am in England—we will call Ireland England for once—I—"

"If you found yourself among cannibals—" interposed Gorman, who knew pretty well what was coming.

"I really don't know whether I could manage human flesh; much would depend on how it was cooked. Fill your glass."

Mr. Gorman Muir complied; Miss Garnsey cracked her last almond.

"I have not found a single double almond amongst them all," she said, looking up disappointed.

"Console yourself, my daughter," observed Mr. Garnsey; "you have made a bull. Mr. Muir, I know you came to say something to me. What is it?"

"I have at last received that money from my uncle."

"Indeed! That looks as if he were repenting him of the evil of his ways. Does he hold out any olive-leaf as a sign that the tempest of his fury has abated?"

"On the contrary, his solicitors, who enclose the draft, intimate Mr. Trevasson's desire that I shall, under no circumstances, communicate with him again."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Mr. Garnsey. His daughter had pushed aside her plate, upheaped with almond-shells, folded her hands on the table, and was listening

intently. "Sell your horse, oil your gun, and take your passage for the Far West?"

"No ; I mean to try to make some money here."

"How?"

"Well, thanks to you, I have made some already."

"But I thought you hated attending fairs and riding about to markets, and that you disliked, beyond even those hardships, asking or accepting a fair price for your horses."

"That is quite true," agreed Gorman, a little confused ; "but I might dislike the Far West more. I know the trouble I have to contend with here, and—"

"A case, in fact, of better the familiar fiend you know than the strange fiend you do not know. You may be right—I cannot say."

"At any rate, I want to stop here, and I do not want to go there."

Mr. Garnsey stole one swift glance at his daughter, even while he said,

"That ought to settle the matter—a man's own wishes are the best guides he can follow."

"I am not quite so sure of that," answered Gorman ; "but, at all events, I mean to accept the guidance of mine."

Mr. Garnsey laughed. "Then you need no advice from me," he remarked. "If I can give you any help on your journey let me know."

"Thank you. I came to ask you to help me. Do you know of any man who thoroughly understands horses, that I could engage to help me?"

"I am afraid I do not—yes, I do. You can have Peter. I will make you a present of Peter. He does not do an hour's work for me in a month, but he'll do your work. I shall be heartily glad to get rid of him. He and the maids are always at daggers drawn. They know he has a wife living somewhere, and that therefore his attentions are useless, not to say compromising. Yes, you shall have Peter."

Miss Garnsey laughed outright as her father spoke of the

feud which raged between the too gallant Peter and the servants at Beechfield.

"Mrs. Murtrie—" she was beginning; but Mr. Garnsey cut ruthlessly across her speech.

"As a poacher," he said, "I can conscientiously recommend Peter; his knowledge of traps is exhaustive; as a setter of night lines he is unsurpassed. There is only one creature on earth wiser in such matters than Peter, and that is his lurcher 'Sniff.' There is something Satanic about that dog. I have seen the pair sitting in the sun hatching some mischief; and I am sure Sniff knew exactly what was passing through Peter's mind. Now, Lydia, much as we appreciate your society, we will not detain you any longer from your four-footed friends. I am sure Weenie must have got her splints off; you had better go and see. Mr. Muir will help you to put them to rights presently."

"I shall be very glad of his assistance," answered Miss Garnsey; and, as Gorman held the door open for her, she looked up at him in a way he could scarcely misunderstand.

"You are not drinking any wine," observed Mr. Garnsey. "Will you have some whisky; there it is on the sideboard? Stop, I'll get it for you myself."

Gorman watched his host a little curiously. On the occasion of each visit the same ceremony was performed. From the servants' hall at Beechfield there had drifted a report throughout the country-side that Mr. Garnsey's favourite liquor was one brewed in an exceedingly hot region, the latitude and longitude of which is not accurately known to geographers. Mr. Garnsey did not intrust the key of the cellar wherein that vintage was stowed away to his butler; and rumour delighted to say the master to whom he had sold himself took good care the bins were never empty. Once—undeterred by the fact of its fiery birthplace—the domestics managed to get a sip of the Satanic brew, which for ever after they described as "fearsome."

"Yes, Peter is the very man for you," said Mr. Garnsey, as he returned to the table, carrying a square decanter in one hand, and a bottle that was of no British manufacture in the

other ; "but you won't have room to go in for many more horses at Ardilaw?"

"That was what I came to speak to you about principally. I want you to let me that farm of yours on the hill."

"Do you mean Finney's old place?"

"Where the house was burnt down."

"Take my advice, and have nothing to do with it. You know the Finneys have sworn no man who ever sows seed there shall reap a harvest."

"I am not afraid of the Finneys, whoever they may be."

"Have you spoken to your father about this?"

"No ; I did not say anything till I knew if I could get the land."

"You can have the land ; but talk the matter over with him before you decide to go on with the matter."

"Well, I will," said Gorman, disappointed.

"There are other farms on earth," said Mr. Garnsey.

"I know there are ; but I had fixed my fancy on that."

"It is a pity. What, won't you take any whisky? Why, you are temperate. Then, perhaps, you would like to go and relieve my daughter's anxiety about 'Weenie'—only," he added, as Gorman twisted the handle of the door, "one word, Muir."

The young man came back, and stood with one hand resting on the table, waiting for what was to follow.

"*No flirtation*," said Mr. Garnsey.

"You may trust me, sir."

"I have other views for her. She will only have five thousand pounds fortune, and she must marry money."

"On my word of honour, Mr. Garnsey—"

"That is quite enough ; remember, I trust you implicitly."

"You may, I assure you."

"Then go and see to those splints," said the owner of Beechfield, with a smile, which widened into a grin when the door closed behind Gorman. "If that does not put a notion into his head," he thought, "he is a greater simpleton than I take him for."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Gorman Muir reached Ardilaw he found his father waiting for him outside the front gate.

"You're late home?" he said, using the words rather in the form of a question than an assertion.

"Yes," answered the younger man, getting off his horse and passing his arm through the bridle as he and his father paced up the hill, where the branches bent low over their heads, to the back entrance. "I have been to Beechfield. I wanted to ask Mr. Garnsey something, and he made me stay to dinner."

"It's just as well you weren't back sooner. The house is quiet now; what it hasn't been all the afternoon. The clergy may talk about the poor demented creature that once upon a time lay among the graves; but if they'd seen Bell awhile back they'd have known something about evil spirits taking possession of a woman supposed to be in her right mind. She has been fairly raving. I never heard the like before in all my life."

"What was wrong with her?"

"According to her own account, nothing was right. I bore it till I could stand no more, and then I just took her by the shoulders and turned her out of the room. I observed the house was mine, and not hers; and that if I wanted a floor scrubbed I'd have it scrubbed, Monday or Tuesday, or any time in the week I pleased."

"O, she did not like the drawing-room being cleaned out," said Gorman, light suddenly dawning upon his mind. "I am so sorry I mentioned the matter. It was very stupid of me."

"Stupid! not a bit. I'm right glad to see the way it looks

now. And, besides, it wasn't altogether the room set Bell's back up. That widow woman from Clear Stream Cottage was the beginning of the fray."

"What did she want?" asked the young man, interested at last. "I met her as I was going out."

"Ay, so she said. She came up, it seems, to ask if I wouldn't let her have the butter and potatoes, and the other things she has, cheaper; and Bell took it into her head the woman had a notion of settling at Ardilaw as mistress. I wouldn't like to say Bell was altogether wrong; for I've had a suspicion myself that if I asked her to be Mrs. Muir number four she mightn't give me 'No' for an answer. I never did come across a greater fool; but for all that I don't want to offend her. She has good people belonging to her; among them, Mr. Richard Vince, the great Belfast merchant, who might have been mayor long enough ago if he'd chosen. He married a Miss Carpenter, who came of a grand family; and they visit at all the best houses both in Antrim and Down. I'd never get a better tenant than Mrs. Boyle. If she hasn't much sense, she has those related to her that have money; and she buys everything from me she wants that I have to sell. What is the use of angering her? That was all I asked Bell; but I declare to you, Gorman, the words were scarcely out of my mouth before I got such a tongue-thrashing as I won't forget in a hurry. I could not edge in a syllable, so I left Bell talking, and started Ned on the drawing-room. She followed me there, and held on till, as I tell you, I turned her out. Then Sally began on me, and then they both set on Carline. You never heard anything like them, man, never. I was well-nigh distracted with the noise; but it's over now for the night. And one thing I've made up my mind to: if Bell can't behave herself she shall go—daughter or no daughter. It's out of the question to suppose she's to have everything her own way. Things have come to a fine pass when a sack or two of oats can't be put in the garret without her leave asked and granted."

"I am vexed, though, to have been the cause of so much trouble. If I had not spoken about that room—"

"She'd have found something else to rail over. She's had a grudge against me ever since I wouldn't let the cottage to Sam Dopp. A likely thing, indeed, to suppose I'd have his tathery-headed children making wreck and ruin of the place Mr. Orr turned into a garden of Eden, in a manner of speaking. It's strange, isn't it, Bell can't stand anything that's only for ornament? I have nothing to say against her cleanliness, except that sometimes I wish she would leave the place dirty; but I can't understand why it is she does so hate beauty of all sorts. If it was only in women, the matter would not get over me; but, upon my conscience, I believe if she had her will, the world would be one big ploughed field, with all the trees cut down for firewood. As for flowers—" at which point Mr. Muir, finding language inadequate to express the fair Isabel's contempt for primroses and violets, was fain to take refuge in silence.

"She is certainly a remarkable young woman," said Gorman—"a little trying sometimes; but then we cannot expect to find all the virtues."

"If we did in Bell we'd be disappointed," answered the farmer; "but we've said all we need say about her. And so Lyle Garnsey would take no refusal, but made you stop for dinner?"

"Yes, he was very kind indeed."

"He has taken a wonderful notion to you."

"I am sure I don't know why, for there are not many subjects on which we think in common."

"I don't see that has much to do with it. If I mind right, you mentioned about needing to ask him something; was he able to tell you what you wanted to know?"

"Yes, and I should like to talk to you about it, if you are not too tired. I'll only give Larry a rub down, and be after you in ten minutes."

"What would you rub Larry down for, when Ned is in the

kitchen waiting to take him from you? There is nothing to hinder you grooming your horse, I allow, if there's nobody else to do it for you; but as long as I pay wages there's no call for me to clean horses myself or let my son clean them."

"I don't mind what I do in that way," answered Gorman, very truly.

"Well, you're not going to do it," said Mr. Muir. "Just put Larry's bridle over the hook, and I'll send Ned out; you are past the common active," he added, half in reproach, half in pleasure, as his son ran into the house to summon Ned for himself.

"Come along," added Mr. Muir, following Gorman and laying a hand on his arm, "and see the fine clearance we've made. Molly hasn't spared elbow-grease on the boards, I can tell you. Look!" and with pardonable pride Mr. Muir threw open the door of that room where stately ladies had received grand company, and wrought rare and costly needlework, and sang the old songs which were new in their day, and loved and sorrowed, and known heartaches and heart-burnings, just the same as any nineteenth-century belle.

Gorman uttered an exclamation of pleasure as he saw the changed look of the apartment. It was clean as Molly's willing hands could make floor and paint. She had swept, and scrubbed, and washed, and dusted. An old oaken sofa-table, brought from the first-floor landing and polished with beeswax till it shone in the leaping firelight, stood beside the hearth, flanked by a couple of antique straight-backed chairs that would have been precious in the sight of any collector; turf glowed in the wide grate, and a beech billet was laid on the top to give brightness to the flame. A brass kettle was singing on the hob, while materials for punch were placed upon the table.

"You'll have a glass for once, Gorman?" said his father, "just to warm you and hansom the new room. I'm well pleased myself at the look of it, and I hope you'll spend many a happy and prosperous hour in it;" having delivered himself of which sentiment, while pouring some whisky into a tumbler, Mr. Muir

at one gulp swallowed that whisky neat—solemnly, and as if he regarded the whole proceeding in the light of a necessary religious ceremony.

“My head won’t stand raw spirits,” said Gorman, laughing, as he mixed himself a very modest allowance of Bushmills.

“Well, well, just as you like,” answered Mr. Muir, in a spirit of rare tolerance; for, indeed, he did not like to hear his son’s head would not stand anything. “Pull up your chair and have a good air of the fire. It’s chilly to-night. I got a feeling of cold while I stood out by waiting for you.”

“I am grieved to have been so late. It was foolish of me to go round by Beechfield, perhaps; but—”

“Foolish?—not a bit of it. You don’t think I mind your stopping out, do you? I’m only proud to see my son so much thought and made of.”

“As I was riding into Belfast to-day,” said Gorman, “I began to lay out my plans—do a little castle-building, in fact,” added the young man; “and when I was on my way back I thought I would take Beechfield on the road, and ask Mr. Garnsey if he knew of any man I could hire to help me. You see, once I go into horse-dealing, as I mean to go in, I shall want some one who can devote the whole of his time to my work.”

“That’s quite right,” said Mr. Muir; “but you might have asked me first.”

“So I would, only I was sure you did not know anybody likely to suit me.”

“And does Mr. Garnsey?”

“He says so—Peter Doey.”

“Peter!” exclaimed Mr. Muir; “Peter! I never thought he’d want to leave Beechfield.”

“Mr. Garnsey seems to want him to leave. There’s some trouble about the servants, I think.”

Mr. Muir laughed. “I shouldn’t have thought Lyle Garnsey would have minded what the servants did. There’s another reason, we may be very sure. However, I wouldn’t say but

Peter might be just what you want. There's not a craftier old rascal in the length and breadth of Down. You'll need to keep a sharp eye on him. There's this much, though: if he cheats you himself, he'll let nobody else cheat you; and as for horses—well, he just couldn't know more about them."

"So far, then, we are right enough. Then there was another thing. You know that farm up the hill, which marches with your land?"

"Yes—Finney's."

"I asked Mr. Garnsey if he would let it to me. It's exactly the sort of place I want."

"And what answer did Mr. Garnsey make?"

"He advised me not to take it."

"I don't know who would want to take it."

"Well, but the quality of the land is nothing to me. It grows some sort of grass, and is a splendid stretch of ground for young things to gallop over, and learn to take their leaps, and—"

"Get houghed, or their tails cut off, or their tongues slit."

"No one would try that game twice with me."

"Wouldn't they? Much you know what they'd do—not stand nice about lodging a bullet in your own head, for that matter."

"I should rather like the excitement of such a business," said Gorman.

"It is a sort of excitement a little of goes a long way," answered Mr. Muir. "For my own part, I hope I'll never have any more of that kind of diversion."

"Why, have you ever had any of it?"

"Have I? Haven't I? Did you never hear tell of the county Down burnings?"

"I do not recollect that I ever did."

"Save us! I thought the English were bad enough; but it is worse to meet a man that was born in Ireland who knows nothing about the destruction of property that went on just round about where we're sitting, no further back than two or

three years. Why, there wasn't a night the sky wasn't red with flames. Over on the other side of the Lough the people used to watch for the fires beginning. Not a man in all these parts but lost something. Haystacks and corn-ricks went like smoke, and at last they fell to the houses; so that when we did go to bed, which wasn't often, we lay down in terror of our lives. At Clear Stream and Kilmoon they put lighted turf in the thatch; but thatch won't burn, you know, without a lot of trouble."

"But do you mean to say that the incendiaries were never caught?"

"Never; not one of them."

"What were you all about, then?"

"Watching our property, and distrusting every man his neighbour. I've watched my ricks myself, and so has many another farmer; and I swear to you while I've been at one end of the haggard the other has been set alight. No; we never got sight even of who did the mischief. If we hadn't known fire couldn't have come without hands to bring it, we'd have thought the tinder had fallen straight down from heaven."

"But, surely, such criminals might have been detected!"

"That's what everybody said till they tried the experiment. I said so; and heaps more beside me. We watched—we laid traps—we were quite prepared to shoot anybody down—but we never set eyes on anybody to shoot."

"It was most extraordinary. I never heard of such a thing."

"Nor anybody else. And I'll tell you another remarkable circumstance. We found out there was a car with five people on it passed the end of this lane every night; and we held a meeting, with closed doors, at Beechfield, where there wasn't a man present we did not believe true—not a man but had suffered loss. We decided to stop the car, and take the five on our own responsibility. When it got near the time a lot of us, who were told off for the purpose, went and laid an ambush along the Newtonards Road. *That night the car did not pass, and it never passed again.* What we all wanted to know—and

what we want to know yet—is who told that we meant to take the law into our own hands?”

Gorman only shook his head in reply. He was puzzled, but not convinced.

“What put a stop to the business at last?” he inquired.

“That’s what we never knew, either; to be sure, there wasn’t much left to burn in the way of hay and straw, and it’s not so easy as anybody might think to fire a house from outside. The way the whole thing ended was this. A big reward had been out a good while without anything coming of it, when, one morning, we heard two girls, that lived with their father near Ballymacarrett, had shot some fellow they thought meant to fire their stacks. They were alone in the house, their father being away; and they fired through a window. They were afraid to go out; but they watched, and saw the man laid on a heap of stones by his comrades till a car drove up, when he was taken away, as they imagined, dead.”

“They were plucky girls,” remarked Gorman.

“Faith, you’ll say that when you hear the finish of the story. You may be sure there was a to-do, the whole countryside running to see the place, and the blood that had soaked down among the paving-stones, and the Belfast papers full of the affair, and the body being searched for, and all suchlike. There was a talk and excitement. I heard some people in England sent the girls a silver teapot, and there were those thought the Queen would want to see them. If they had been Queens themselves, more couldn’t have been made of them than was made, while the police were working up the only clue they had—a cloth cap, that had fallen off the man’s head while they were carrying him to the heap of stones.”

“I wish I had seen those girls,” said Gorman; “are they living in Ballymacarrett now?”

“No. What do you suppose the upshot of the whole matter was?”

“They got the reward, I suppose, and a good deal more; and married well, and—”

"I'll tell you. The blood on the stones was analysed, and found to be bullock's blood. My ladies had got it off a butcher in Hercules Street, and they had bought the cap, and they had never shot anybody; and they were glad enough to go to America."

"Good heavens! And the burnings?"

"O, they stopped at once."

"Then do you suppose—"

"I can't suppose; the whole thing beats me fairly. Two girls, even with the help of their father, couldn't have set a whole country-side in flames."

"I am not so sure of that," remarked young Mr. Muir; "it is wonderful what even one woman can do, if she lays her mind to it."

"You are right, if it is any manner of harm," said his father.

CHAPTER XX.

"PETER," said Mr. Garnsey, "I am going to hand you over to a new master."

The abruptness of this address might have surprised some persons; but it was difficult to surprise Mr. Doey. When a man selects a garden-roller for his seat on a raw winter's day, and calmly continues sitting and smoking while addressed by a superior, he can scarcely be judged by the rules supposed to govern ordinary mortals.

The roller was moss-covered, like the walks; but at meal-times, as well as on many other occasions, Mr. Peter Doey did his best to remove this reproach by obligingly transferring a portion of the green to his own garments.

He was a short, wiry fellow, with a dried-up face curiously wrinkled, small bright eyes, and thin black hair just turning gray. He looked as if he had lived all his life in an atmosphere of peat smoke, and never been washed since he was born. Sniff lay beside him, head between his paws, one ear cocked, ready for any evil errand on which it might please Peter to despatch him. Mr. Garnsey, clean shaven, fresh from his morning bath, both hands plunged in the pockets of a trim pea-jacket, stood looking at dog and man, waiting for Peter's comment upon his information.

"There is one comfort," said that worthy, taking the pipe out of his mouth so as to speak with greater ease, "I couldn't have a worse master than yourself."

"Surely that is scarcely grateful," remonstrated the master so addressed.

"Grateful! What would I be grateful for? Worked harder nor any beast, and for less nor a beast's wages. Mornin', noon,

and night, it is just 'Peter, Peter, Peter,' till I'm fairly tired and sick of the sound of my own name. First it's you 'Do this and do the other,' and 'Why the —— don't you attend to what I tell you?' Then it's your daughter wanting me to cut her dog's ears, or clip her mare, or brush her habit that's splashed with as many sorts of mud as there's soils in the county. Then while I'm choking myself over that, Mrs. Murtrie starts me off for something she's forgotten to order out of the town, and I declare to my conscience, what with the butler, 'Peter, go there;' and the footman, 'Give this a shake;' and the coachman, 'Lend a hand here;' and the housemaid, 'Peter dear, mind you don't forget that calico for me;' and the cook, 'What a good-for-nothing fellow you are, and not a lemon in the house!' I don't know most times where Peter is at all, whether in Belfast, or down the village, or at Beechfield, jogging along to Newtonards, or breaking my neck 'lepping' hedges and ditches to catch the train."

"Poor Peter!" said Mr. Garnsey, "console yourself. For the future you will have only one master to serve, and only one thing to do, and that is look after horses."

"And what master is it you want me to serve now? Mind, I haven't said I'm going to him, whoever he may be. For the bite and sup a man has to make a snatch at in haste and sorrow, you may drive him about as if he was no more nor a beast of burden; but you can't sell him, like a slave. This is a free country to starve in, at any rate; and I don't know but I'd as soon starve as lead the life I've been leading here."

"I am sorry you have been so miserable with me; but you certainly will have a better berth where you are going than I could ever find you."

"I'm not so sure that I'm going anywhere."

"But I am. I have promised you to my friend, and—"

"If he's a friend of yours, Mr. Garnsey, maybe if I agreed to take his money I'd be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire. Why can't you tell me the man's name at once—that is, always supposing he's not a woman?"

"It is young Mr. Muir."

"D'ye mean Gorman? What does he want with me?"

"To look after his horses."

"He has only got one."

"But he means to keep a lot. He is going to make his fortune out of them—if he can."

"What would hinder him making his fortune? You mind there is *One* takes care of his own; and if ever a coin had the image and superscription of Satan graven on it, that coin's Gorman Muir."

"I don't see much sign of the cloven hoof about him," said Mr. Garnsey, surprised at Peter's manner.

Apparently Mr. Doey considered this remark unworthy of reply, for he put his pipe again in his mouth, and went on smoking, till the owner of Beechfield, a little nettled, perhaps, at a knowledge of iniquity wider than his own, observed,

"Let Mr. Gorman Muir be what he will, he knows a good horse when he sees him."

"And he knows a pretty girl when he sees *her*," capped Peter, with a malicious grin.

"A man must be stone-blind who cannot do that."

"And *he's* not blind," said Peter, with conviction.

There ensued a moment's silence, during the course of which Peter puffed away meditatively, and Mr. Garnsey, with the toe of his boot, stirred the short grass on which Sniff was lying.

"You'd best let him alone, master," advised Mr. Doey; "he's got a way of snapping sometimes you wouldn't like, if you felt his teeth meet through the leather."

Mr. Garnsey took the hint, and desisted. "Then I may tell young Muir," he began, "that you'll go to him?"

"'Deed, you may tell him no such thing," answered Peter. "I have thrown myself away once, and before I engage again I'll want to know a whole heap of things I was so foolish as to make no inquiry about here. I'm no flyabout—one place to-day and another to-morrow; and before I stir one step I

must know what I'm to do, and how I'm to be paid. Besides, where's the man going to keep his horses? If it's at Ardilaw, he must search about for some other nor me to look after them. It would need a bigger stable even than any Mr. Cleery owns for me and Hewson Muir to put up in together."

"He is going to rent Finney's land from me."

"Is he tired of his life?"

"It looks as if he were. I don't want harm to come to him, but he is set on taking the farm; and, after all, some one must run the risk. The place can't lie idle for ever."

Mr. Doey knocked the ashes out of his pipe, laid it carefully on the roller, and then, locking his hands together, sat considering the position.

"What shall I tell Mr. Gorman Muir you'll do?" Mr. Garnsey asked at length; while Sniff, opening one eye, looked slyly up at the speaker, as though listening with appreciative interest to the conversation.

"I don't know myself, master; so how would I tell you? If the young man thinks he has need of me, he had best come and say so. There's many a thing would have to be settled between us. It's a come-down in the world from Beechfield to Finney's Farm—never to speak of the perils I might, like Saint Paul, have to encounter over yonder. He'd be bound to consider all that in the wages, for I have no intention of leaving here unless I better myself. The last man took Finney's Farm was burned out of house and home; and it's always against a hired servant to be connected with anybody gets into trouble or makes a disturbance in the world. Now if young Gorman was killed, I might have to give evidence, and—"

"Decide the matter between you, and be damned," said Mr. Garnsey, waxing impatient.

"Well, well, master, if that should come to pass we'll all be in the same boiling," answered Peter, as he slowly gathered himself up from his chilly seat, and limped off with the gait of a cripple towards the stable-yard, followed by Sniff.

He had not, however, gone a dozen paces before he turned and retraced his steps.

"Mr. Garnsey, sir," he began.

"What is it now?" asked that gentleman.

"I wish when you see young Muir you would give him a hint to say nothing of what is in his mind about needing the benefit of my help and taking advantage of my experience. Maybe I might never leave Beechfield. Anyhow, there is no use giving the whole country-side words to set to music." Having uttered which profound remark, Mr. Doey really took his departure.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN a man has set his heart on any course, he is always able to give fifty excellent reasons why he should pursue it ; but he usually omits to state the true cause, which lies at the bottom of the whole matter. Mr. Gorman Muir proved no exception to this rule. His talk as the days went by ran on the cheapness and convenience and general desirability of Finney's Farm ; but he never said that a girl's face was keeping him in Ireland, chained to one particular piece of country lying between Newtownards and Belfast.

As Mr. Garnsey so truly remarked, there were other farms to be let in Down ; and, as Gorman himself could have told all concerned, there were more counties than Down in Ireland, and other countries in the world beside that of his birth, to one of which he would immediately have set about transporting himself and his fortunes had he never seen Berna Boyle. For the first time in his life he was in love. At his age, and with his temperament, it would be folly to say he had never before been taken captive by a pair of bright eyes : he had fancied, and flirted, and kissed, and lain awake at night, and written poetry by day, and believed his heart would break if sweet Kathleen or merry Norah refused to smile on his suit ; but in proportion as the maids grew kinder his affection cooled. All through his boy and earlier manhood he was perpetually apostrophising the wrong woman. Did he write a sonnet to Mary, he immediately found out he ought to have inscribed it to Aileen ; after chanting the praises of Aileen he was sure to discover his affinity in Lucy. Many a girl wept bitter tears over the young vagabond's inconstancy before he was twenty-one ; but as he grew older there were those who, though they

made no moan, suffered deeper pain, because with all their arts they could win no glance of special tenderness from those deep brown eyes that, while seeming to make love to all the better part of creation, took very good care to bestow no look of individual interest on any single fair.

He had been courted, flattered, smiled on, sung to, danced with, till at two-and-twenty he was fairly tired of being run after. He felt weary of girls and women, of mothers and daughters. He longed for some wider sphere of action; he wanted to go out and see the world. He wished to be an officer; to cut the Mount Michael leading-strings, which always dragged him back to Kilkenny just when he most wanted to take a run on from Paris to Madrid, and reminded him he was staying too long in London, though he might have been enjoying the pleasures of that capital only for a month. Mr. Trevasson was at once too indulgent and too exacting. Had Gorman been his son, and the Mount Michael estates strictly entailed, he could not have brought the young fellow up with a greater certainty that one day every tenant would call him master; and yet the moment he dared to exercise the smallest free will he was pulled sharply back into inaction and dependence. As a boy, the length of his tether had sufficed; but when Gorman grew to manhood, the knowledge that though he might proceed a certain distance, he could not go further afield, chafed his restless spirit, and caused him to long with tenfold intensity to break bounds.

It was about the same time that he began to grow weary of bewitching amazons and timid sirens. Amongst the ladies of his acquaintance there were many beautiful, amiable, accomplished, in all respects desirable; but Gorman had known them for years, and was heartily tired of their attractions. Such indifference to the fair sex is, at that age and with such temperaments, more common than women like to imagine possible. He had his dream-love, the joint offspring of poetry and fantasy; but he believed, wherever the fleshly tabernacle containing that divine conception resided, it was not in the

county Kilkenny. Far away in some Eastern land, after wild adventure and long travel, he might—in the evening, or the morning, or the noontide of some happy day—meet his Rebekah, passing fair to look upon; but he was in no hurry to do so. She would still be waiting for him, pitcher on her shoulder, or sheep following her to the well; while he wandered through strange lands and unaccustomed scenes, to find his dream-woman thousands of miles from the little emerald isle, modestly stated by one of her poets to be “in the ring of the world—the most precious stone.”

Meantime Mr. Trevasson wished him to marry an heiress who was certainly neither a Rebekah nor a Rachel. Gorman, however, wanted to choose his own heiress, when, in the fulness of time, it should become necessary for him to choose at all; and over this difference of opinion there ensued the first real quarrel between uncle and nephew. It did not last long; for the lady, whose own preferences had never been consulted, chose a clergyman for husband, and Mr. Trevasson felt glad enough to find an excuse for again taking into favour the kinsman he loved. Time went by; still Gorman hunted, and fished, and shot, and danced, and grew more and more idle, and, if the truth must be told, more and more accustomed to the useless life he led. Satan, we are told, always finds work for the unemployed; and it may be that Satan now and then did find a not unwilling servant in the gentleman no one doubted would inherit Mount Michael.

By and by Rumour began to busy herself about Mr. Gorman Muir. Whatever his sins, they were, perhaps, painted blacker than facts warranted. Gossip always takes sides against the criminal. She has long constituted herself public prosecutor on behalf of society, and if the young man had been white as snow—which he was not—she would soon have contrived to bespatter him with mud.

It was then Miss Dora Autrim, who had recently arrived in the neighbourhood, spoke up in Gorman's behalf. *She* would never believe ill of Mr. Trevasson's nephew, she said.

He *must* be good and honourable. It was wicked for people to talk as they did about him. And she took him into great favour, and would gladly have accepted the task of changing this leopard's spots if the young man would have let her.

He, however, preferred to keep his spots as they were ; he would have none of Miss Autrim's kind attentions. He had never liked, and at last he grew to hate, her light ringlets, her great blue eyes, her baby face, her rosebud mouth, her pearly teeth, her soft caressing ways.

When Mr. Muir said his son had played his cards badly, he was quite right. Gorman let her read the whole of his antipathy, and only laughed when, with a little mocking curtsy, she remarked, "We shall see," and left the room.

He did see. She was an unscrupulous player, and in her hand she held those court cards, youth and beauty, that count for so much in the game of life. It was her turn to laugh when she entered Mount Michael as Mr. Trevasson's wife ; her day of triumph when, three months later, Gorman passed her in the hall on his way out—a dethroned heir, a disgraced man. Full was his heart of bitterness while he rode down the long avenue, never once looking back, with his face sternly set towards that world he had now perfect liberty to conquer if he could.

No one ever probably began a fresh career with a firmer determination to keep out of love and mischief than Gorman Muir ; and yet a chance encounter in the ghostly twilight, a few words spoken by a girl he did not know, a glimpse of an upturned face he could scarcely see, sufficed to break down all the barriers he had erected with such care—to change his whole destiny, and influence every day of his future life.

He might not have stayed one hour at Ardilaw after he received his thousand pounds, but for the thought of Berna, who would not speak to or look at him ; who seemed to hold it an offence that his eyes should rest on her ; who would not let the skirt of her dress touch him as she passed in church.

It was this led him on. Had she been different, he might

have forgotten her as he had forgotten others. Had he met her in Kilkenny, been formally introduced, talked to her, laughed with her, she never could have stamped her image on his heart, as was the case. In the common round of daily life he kept ever following one gliding phantom—Berna Boyle. He did not once mention her name; but he listened with avidity to the slightest word dropped about her. For the first time in his memory love made him shy—love caused him to be fearful—love seemed to ennoble him. In every previous affair he had thought but of self—all his care was now for her. She was poor—early and late he would work to make money. She had come down in the world—it should be his glory to give her back all she once possessed, and more. Of her daily life—what she did, thought, felt—he knew absolutely nothing. But this ignorance, so far from damping his romantic musings, only increased their ardour. He was chained by no fetters of fact, hampered by no rules of conventionality. Through dreamland he roved at will, still following a flitting figure, which never once turned its head to look behind. He had found his Rebekah. He had met his Rachel. But the acts of gracious kindness, the smiles of bashful tenderness, still only gleamed amid the mists of a dim vague distance.

As yet his love was all fancy—and shall we say folly (since the world has still to learn intuition is the truest wisdom)? But yet it could not but be considered as founded on a rock, because even in its most shadowy recesses it held no thought of turning, had conceived no idea of wrong—it was grand, loyal, hopeful, true, and modest. Whether with man or woman, the best fruits of the soul are accounted well-nigh valueless, and timidly offered on the shrine of love as things of no account. Such as he was—and faults balanced by many virtues held at times high revelry in Gorman Muir's nature—he had fallen head over ears in love with Berna Boyle. To him, her low estate seemed next to nothing—to her, the knowledge that he was Mr. Muir's son raised a barrier she imagined years could not raze or circumstances destroy. To Berna it

all appeared most horrible. Unwittingly, her fancy had strayed out to meet this stranger, who ought never to be anything to a Boyle of Boyle Court. For a short space—while she did not know who he was, during the time she only saw a horse and his rider—her errant fancy went out to meet the hero of romance so many girls create for themselves from the unlikeliest materials; but when she knew him as Gorman Muir, Berna steeled her young heart against him. What! she her father's daughter, and think of such a man as that—a man not merely low, but wicked; a man who had the assurance to imagine her the same as himself, and conceive a girl who came of such a stock, who boasted a lineage like her own, could answer look for look, and take step with step in that awful way that might lead her at last to acknowledge Hewson Muir of Ardilaw for father-in-law!

And there was nothing further from Gorman's notion than any idea of asking his dainty stately love to cast in her lot with his people. For six-and-twenty years he had not lived among those who accounted themselves of the bluest of blue blood for nothing. If his darling could have associated with his people, he would not have thought so highly of her as he did.

No; when once she was won, he would take her away. He did not know where; but far from Ardilaw, at all events. Some day, some happy day, he should be able to tell her all that was in his mind. Looking down on the stretch of open sea that bursts upon the view when the hill beyond Ardilaw is climbed, and the height of Craigantlet reached, or peeping from the green arch formed by interlacing trees at the sight of Carrickfergus Lough to be obtained as the cross-road from Dundonald nears Holywood, and the county Antrim seems close enough to touch, and the water, though three or four miles in width, appears no broader than a tiny lake, and any one might think he could throw a pebble on the deck of the English steamer hugging the Down shore—Gorman determined to speak to Berna Boyle of his dead mother, and Clon-

mellin, and Mount Michael, and show her how, Ardilaw notwithstanding, he had the right to count himself one of the select hundred thousand, the lower million in Ireland were at that period, when birth went for much and money for little, for ever toiling after in vain.

"You'll be for building yourself a fine house one of these days, up on Finney's Farm, sorr," said Peter, after various preliminaries had been settled between him and his prospective master entirely to that worthy's mind.

"What should I build a house on Finney's Farm for?" asked Mr. Gorman Muir, surprised.

"You needn't be a bit feared," observed the man reassuringly. "There's just a pair left in this country would do a thing to hinder you; and, with the Lord's help, we'll tackle them—ay, and beat them, too—that is to say, if you'll be guided by Peter."

"But I don't want to build a house. What do you imagine I should do with a house up there?"

"Live in it with your wife, when you bring her home."

Gorman was so surprised he could not help changing countenance. Nevertheless he looked straight into Mr. Doey's shrewd, wrinkled face, while he said,

"When I marry—if ever I do—I hope I shall be able to take my wife to a different sort of place altogether from Finney's Farm."

Peter drew down his brows and screwed up his eyes, and, fairly puzzled, thought for a moment before he asked,

"It's the truth you're speaking, Mr. Gorman, and not a lie?"

"The truth, of course. Why should you doubt me?"

"Well, that's queer, too," commented Peter. And for many a long day he never touched on so delicate a subject again.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT was a dreary afternoon in December, as dreary as afternoon could be. All the morning a high warm wind prevailed, sweeping dull masses of gray clouds across a sky unrelieved by even a gleam of sunshine; and as the day wore on a slight drizzle of rain began to fall, which at length, without the slightest warning, turned in a moment to a wild storm of hail. Berna, who had been on a mission connected with eggs and poultry to Mrs. Gribben, was met by this storm as she came down the hill from Craigantlet. Before one could have clapped hands, her umbrella was turned inside out, her shawl almost torn off her back, her skirt twisted round her ankles, her bonnet on her neck, and her face tingling with the smart of the hailstones, which stung like the cut of a whip. Almost blinded, she instinctively made for the nearest shelter, the garden hedge of Ardilaw, which bounded one side of the road, about twenty paces from the spot where the storm burst upon her.

Breathless and dishevelled, she squeezed herself between a brick pillar and the privet, and panting, waited for the first violence of the tempest to exhaust itself ere repairing damages. She had not stood there more than a few seconds before a man jumped over the opposite ditch, and, holding his dripping hat on with one hand, crossed the road.

"Why, Miss Boyle, is that you?" said Mr. Muir, for it was he; "don't stand there. Come in, come in;" and he opened the garden-gate, which was fastened with a chain and padlock, as he spoke.

"Thank you, but I think the storm will soon blow over," answered Berna, who had never got into cordial relations with their landlord.

"You may as well wait in the house as here," he returned, still holding the gate open. "It's an awful day. I wish Gorman had chosen any other to ride across to Comber. He'll be fairly drenched."

"I will get home as fast as I can," said Berna, ignoring the Gorman question altogether, and making a futile attempt to pull her bonnet into position.

"That you won't," declared Mr. Muir, who for the first time in their short acquaintance realised the full extent of the girl's beauty, as she stood with her hair tossed about her face, and a brilliant wind-blown colour in her cheeks, looking, in that leafy shelter, as he often afterwards said, "like a picture." "How could ever I meet your mother again, if I let you stop out here to be chilled to your marrow? Come along. You're keeping me out in the wet, too; and Bell 'll find a cloak to wrap round you as you go back."

Without actual discourtesy, Berna felt she could no longer refuse to enter Ardilaw. "You are very kind," she said, and stepped once more out into the weather. In a trice Mr. Muir had shut and locked the gate, and with a caution to "keep close to the hedge," started running towards the house in advance of Berna, from whom he thus managed to keep some of the violence of the storm. It was awful. The hail pelted on their heads; the wind swirled and eddied, as if anxious to tear them limb from limb; twigs, dead leaves, and straw were flying in all directions; as they crossed the yard the very dog only looked at them shivering, refusing to leave the shelter of his kennel in order to bark at Berna.

In the kitchen there was not a soul. Berna stood for a minute within the porch to let the wet drip off her garments.

"Come in, come in," repeated Mr. Muir. "What are you waiting for? Never mind the flags. I don't know where my daughters are; but step this way, and I'll soon find out. Mind you don't trip, it's dark here." And so he led the way to the hall, where, pushing open the door of that room Gorman had furnished, he was about to ask Berna to sit down till he

summoned his daughters, when he perceived, with astonishment, that the whole family was there assembled.

A bright fire blazed on the hearth, in front of which stood Miss Garnsey, a light whip in her hand, the skirt of her riding-habit thrown over her arm, a huge dog stretched at her feet, talking volubly to Mr. Gorman Muir. The two Misses Muir, and Carline, now Mrs. Cragland, were listening with all their ears to the young lady's discourse, which she broke off when Mr. Muir entered, in order to greet that worthy with enthusiasm.

"You did not expect to see me, I know," she said, holding out her hand, and shaking his as though he had been her dearest friend. "My mare got a stone in her shoe, and I turned in here to ask one of your men to take it out, when Mr. Gorman appeared on the scene. He made me come in. Lucky, wasn't it? If I'd been out now, I should have got soaked to the skin. But you are wet through, Mr. Muir, and so are you," she added, addressing Berna, who, having tried at sight of the group collected round Miss Garnsey to effect her escape, was held by the farmer as though she had been his prisoner.

"We're not quite so bad as all that comes to, but we're bad enough," answered Mr. Muir. "Carline, help Miss Boyle off with her shawl; and, Bell, you hang up her bonnet to dry. Where did you start up from, Gorman? I thought you'd be at Comber by this time."

"I heard Neely was not at home, so I did not go on," answered Gorman, who had risen when he saw Berna, and now offered her his chair.

"I am afraid you have got sadly wet," he said, taking her shawl from Carline.

"O no!" she replied. "Thank you, I would rather not sit so near the fire;" and she retreated a little from the hearth.

"You ought to change everything you have on, at once," said Miss Garnsey, speaking with great decision. "You will catch your death of cold; and I'm sure you are not strong, you don't look so."

"I am very strong," answered Berna, smiling in spite of herself; "and I must get home as soon as possible. Mamma will be uneasy about me."

"Well, there's one comfort," retorted Miss Garnsey; "nobody will be uneasy about me. It would drive me wild to have any person fretting and fuming if I were not back to a minute. Papa began that sort of thing, but I soon put a stop to it;" and she turned to Mr. Muir for approval; who, however, remarked he thought it best young girls should be bound by some sort of rule.

"If you were my daughter," he added gallantly, "I think I'd want to know you were safe and sound; and when you get a husband, I'm very sure he'll not be content to have you out of his sight for half an hour together."

"Really, Mr. Muir, you are a most delightful person," exclaimed Miss Garnsey; "you will make me quite vain. I assure you I am not accustomed to receive such charming compliments."

"Ah, that's what you tell *us*!" said Mr. Muir; "but I'll never believe such a change has taken place in the world since my time. When I was a young man, there was nothing came readier off my tongue than a quiet word of that sort to a pretty girl. I wish I was young again, for your sake."

"And I wish you were young again, for my own," declared Miss Garnsey, patting the dog with her foot.

"Carline, perhaps Miss Garnsey would take a cup of tea," suggested Gorman, cutting across the conversation, in dread, perhaps, of where it might lead.

"I should like one very much indeed," said Miss Garnsey; "and, Miss Muir, as we came through the kitchen I saw some delicious potato-cakes baking; mightn't we have some? I never get any at home. Mrs. Murtrie won't make them. Don't you like potato-cake, Miss Boyle?"

Miss Boyle answered that she did, but without enthusiasm. "I do hope," she said, in a low tone to Carline, who hovered

near her, "the shower will soon be over; mamma does get *so* uneasy."

"Make yourself content, miss," interposed Mr. Muir, answering Berna's looks rather than her words: "your mamma won't say a word to you. Once the weather moderates I'll drive you home myself. Good people are scarce, and pretty people are scarcer, and I'll not risk the loss of one that's both good and pretty."

"You ought to get up and make a curtsy for that," exclaimed Miss Garnsey, at the same time stealing a glance towards Gorman, to see how he took his father's remark; but Gorman's face was inscrutable.

When Miss Garnsey was of the company, it proved no easy matter to edge in a word, even sideways. Mr. Muir only, of all present, attempted to do so, and the consequence proved he and she had the conversational ball to themselves, tossing it to and fro, with a good deal of boldness on the farmer's part, while Berna sat on thorns, wishing she had never entered the house and that she were well out of it.

Tea appeared. Whatever her feelings at having to permit a meal so utterly out of season, Miss Muir was forced to control them. She had declined Miss Garnsey's proffered help; she had negatived that young lady's request to be allowed to butter the cakes; grimly she had "set out" the best china, and produced a silver service which once belonged to that sainted woman, Mrs. Muir number two; and now with stoical resignation she sat down to pour out tea for their landlord's daughter, who compelled Berna to take a cup, and could not, to quote Miss Muir subsequently, "sit like a Christian," but walked about the room eating and drinking as she paced from fire to window, talking, laughing, and enjoying herself thoroughly.

"So you've got a piano," she said, pausing before a small instrument Gorman had hired. "Who plays?" and she looked around at the ladies of the Muir household.

"None of us," answered Carline. "It is Gorman."

"You! Why, I never knew you could play."

"I only strum," answered the young man. "Won't you try the instrument, Miss Garnsey?"

"I? Good gracious, no! I detest playing. I suffered enough while learning my notes to make me hate it for ever."

"Miss Boyle, you sing, I know—"

"How do you know?" asked Miss Garnsey sharply.

"She looks as if she did," answered Gorman, somewhat confused.

"Do give us a song," entreated Mr. Muir; a request which was so earnestly repeated by his daughter that Berna, to avoid argument, did as she was asked.

"Well, that's beyond the common," said Mr. Muir, when the last note died away. "I didn't think sounds like that could come out of a woman's throat. The lark's no better than you. But I'm afraid we've tired you; all the colour has gone from your face. Come here by the fire and rest. Gorman 'll, maybe, sing you a song himself now."

Berna did not beg Gorman to do so, but Miss Garnsey made up for her omission. The evening was darkening down; the old room was lighted only by the flickering firelight; without, the wind howled around the house; within, there was silence, broken only by the sound of Gorman's voice as it rose and fell, trembled with passionate tenderness, and died away in sorrowful appeal. "Adelaïde" was the song he selected. More absurd words were probably never set to music, but that did not signify. As Berna listened she could not see the leaping blaze for a mist of tears.

"Hail or shine, I think I'll have to make the best of my way home now," said Miss Garnsey, when the song was finished.

"And Gorman will go with you," suggested Mr. Muir.

"I will walk beside you with pleasure," remarked Gorman, certainly with no tone of pleasure in his voice; "but I can't ride, my horse has cast a shoe."

"Thank you; but I need no escort except Bruce," an-

swered Miss Garnsey, a little shortly. "I will get away now," and then she bade good-evening all round and, accompanied by Gorman and her dog, walked off to the stable-yard.

"I wonder, now, what brought her here to-day?" marvelled Mr. Muir, not without a certain touch of pride in his voice.

"Do you? I don't," retorted Miss Bell. "Anybody with half an eye could see she came after Gorman. Well, she need have money, for I am sure she's no beauty; but money's all the men think of."

"Man or woman's not much without it," said Mr. Muir sententiously. "Sit still, sit still, Miss Boyle. If you must go, I'll have the gig brought round; you sha'n't walk one foot of the way to Clear Stream this night."

"It's not fit for anybody to be out in such weather that can stop at home," observed Miss Muir, with some acrimony.

"Indeed, I am very sorry I came out," answered Berna, who could not fail to see the drift of Bell's remark. "I feel quite distressed at the idea of giving your father so much trouble."

"You needn't be fretting yourself about that," was the reply. "He never minds trouble, if it is for strangers." Upon the whole, it was not easy to converse with Miss Muir.

Berna stood looking into the twilight while Mr. Muir was absent; talking sometimes softly to Carline, sometimes adventuring a remark to the second Miss Muir, and even occasionally essaying a word to the redoubtable Bell.

"I am very, very much obliged to you all," said Berna, as Carline wrapped the shawl close around her, with an action that was almost a timid embrace.

"O, you've no call to be that," returned Bell ambiguously.

"Now, if you're ready," suggested Mr. Muir, putting his head into the room; "I don't want to hurry you, but the horse doesn't like standing."

"Where's Gorman?" asked Carline.

"We can't be waiting on Gorman," Mr. Muir replied. "Likely as not he's half-way to Beechfield by this."

But Gorman was not half-way to Beechfield. As they passed out of the house they found him standing beside the gig.

"There is no need for you to turn out," he said to his father. "I can drive Miss Boyle home."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WE had better go round by the road," said Mr. Gorman Muir to his companion, as he drove slowly out of Ardilaw. "The cross lane will be very heavy after all the rain we have had."

"Do you think so?" answered Berna faintly. She had shrunk into the very smallest possible space, and found it difficult to prevent her teeth chattering as loudly as the spokes of Mr. Muir's old gig rattled.

"Yes; it will be in a shocking condition," returned Gorman, and then he paused. He did not know what to say next. Precious minutes were flying, and he felt tongue-tied. With any other girl he would have found plenty to talk about. He had driven girls home before that night, and could not remember that the conversation well ever dried up; but now it seemed frozen. Ah! the moonlights, and the twilights, and the starlights that all came back to memory as he peered forward into the darkness! Evenings on the water; evenings wandering among flowers, while the sound of music floated across the warm summer air; evenings when he looked at downcast blushing faces and upturned laughing eyes, and words were not lacking, or, for that matter, looks either; and now—he felt stricken dumb.

But faint heart, as we know, never won fair lady; added to which it was manifestly impossible two persons could drive steadily through the night and never exchange a syllable. Accordingly, though the voice in which he spoke sounded strange to his ears, Gorman began,

"I am glad, Miss Boyle, to have at last an opportunity of apologising for frightening you so much the first time we met.

The matter has been a weight on my conscience from that evening till this hour."

"I was more startled than frightened, I think," Berna answered.

"Yet you have not walked there since," he said, and unconsciously he leaned a little towards her, and his voice took a tenderer tone.

"Well, it is scarcely the season," suggested Berna, who at that moment would have welcomed any accident that had taken her out of the gig.

"That is true," he answered. "When the fine weather comes again, I trust you will not let the memory of my unfortunate intrusion prevent your taking what I should imagine must be a pleasant stroll."

"I do not know where we may be when the fine weather comes again," said the girl, ignoring the implied question concerning the delights of wandering through Mr. Muir's meadow.

"Why, are you thinking of moving? I imagined you were settled here."

"Mamma does not like the country. She often speaks of moving into some town."

"Belfast?"

"No; not Belfast. Bangor, possibly. She has friends there; she has none here."

"But you, Miss Boyle, you would not wish to leave Clear Stream?"

"I think I should like to go to Bangor," she answered. "I love the sea."

He did not know what to say after that, it seemed a complete rout. True, Bangor was not far away, but it could never be the same thing as Dundonald. If she went there, who could predict what might happen? Once again he sat dumb; this time from misery, not shyness.

"I was in hopes that you would have remained at Clear Stream," he ventured at last; "it is a pretty little cottage."

"Yes; but it is lonely for mamma."

"And for you?"

"I do not mind about that. All places are much the same to me—now—"

"Ah!" he said; "I do not think place has much to do with happiness. I, for instance—" then, "Were you ever in the county Kilkenny, Miss Boyle?"

"No. Our county was Mayo."

"I do not know Mayo. I once spent a month in Galway, near Lough Cong, with some people called Vassaleur. Perhaps you may have heard of them."

"Yes; from the Dowager—I mean old Mrs. Boyle. They were friends of hers." She could have added that the families once hoped to be closely allied. A daughter of the house, now a middle-aged spinster, might possibly have been her father's wife, but for that unfortunate meeting with Milly Vince, which made such a wreck of his after existence.

"Old Mr. Vassaleur was shot one day as he was driving up his own avenue," said Gorman, beating the coverts of his mind in vain for some clever or original remark.

"Yes," agreed Berna, to whom every detail of the murder had been familiar for years.

"That is what I shall be one day, I expect."

"Why?" For the first time Berna's voice had a touch of interest.

"Because I have taken Finney's Farm—"

"Who is Finney?"

"He was a man who held under the Ardilaws; he had been evicted before Mr. Garnsey bought the land, and when the Ardilaws let the farm to a fresh tenant the house was burnt down about his ears. After Mr. Garnsey got possession, he let the land to some one, who put a fresh roof on the house, and ran up the party walls, and made the place habitable once more. No sooner was that done than the fresh tenant was burnt out, narrowly escaping with his life. For a time Mr. Garnsey cropped the ground himself, but the potatoes were

dug out of the drills, and the corn cut green. It has been lying fallow for years, and now I am going to try my luck."

"But is not that foolish? Some harm may come to you."

"If harm does come, who is there to care? In the world, I suppose, there is not a more lonely man than myself."

"You have your father and your sisters," said Berna, taking refuge in one of those statements which are safe because purely conventional.

Gorman laughed, a little bitterly. "When a man has been away for six-and-twenty years from all his relations, he finds not merely that they can do very well without him, but that he can do very well without them."

"It is sad to hear any one say so."

"Why should it be? We were all meant to leave home, to form fresh ties, to make new interests for ourselves. I have not made any fresh ties yet, and therefore it signifies little what becomes of me."

There could be no answer to this. Berna felt strongly any fresh ties Mr. Gorman Muir chose to form ought to be nothing to her; whilst the young man, conscious that matters were at last progressing a little, waited painfully for what might happen next. A word, a single word of sympathy, and he would have told her there was one for whose sake he might be induced to count life valuable—one he held as high above him as the stars of heaven, one he scarcely dared to think of as ever likely to smile on him; but Berna did not speak that word.

Instinct, which is often so much safer a guide than experience, taught her she stood on the very verge of dangerous ground.

While they were talking, Gorman had let the horse slacken his pace almost to a walk. "At this rate," thought Berna, "it will be an hour before we get to Clear Stream;" and what might such a man not say even in a few minutes?

"O Mr. Muir," she exclaimed, "would you mind driving a little quicker? It is very late, and mamma will be so uneasy."

Gorman started as if from a dream, and gave the horse a couple of slashing cuts with the whip, which caused him to spring forward and then settle into a long, stretching trot, which made the gig rock and the loose spokes shake as though the crazy vehicle were going to pieces.

"Don't beat the poor thing," entreated Berna; "perhaps he is very tired. I ought not to have stopped so long at Ardilaw, or allowed your father to send me home."

"Perhaps you think you ought to have got wet through, and tramped home along lanes which are now a foot deep in mud," said Gorman ironically, taking the animal, which was momentarily increasing its speed, well in hand. "No, Miss Boyle," he went on, in a different tone; "had we let you do anything of the sort, we ought to have been shot; and as for the horse, he is not tired; he has not been out of the stable for two days. I wonder, now, if you think I am cruel; if you do, you are mistaken. I would not wilfully hurt anything. You believe me? I should like to hear you say you believe that, at any rate."

"I should be very sorry to believe otherwise; but—"

"You think I was too rough with the poor old fellow, Perhaps I was, and I am sorry for it; but if you saw him following me about at Ardilaw, and trying to put his nose into my pockets for bread or carrots, I am sure you would see he understands me. One may seem unkind sometimes, and yet never mean to be so."

If he expected her to make any comment on this general statement, Mr. Gorman Muir was mistaken.

"I had a pony once," Berna said, in a didactic sort of way, "that would eat anything—bread, apples, walnuts, plums—which it could steal. Such a funny little pony!" and Berna's voice faltered. She wondered where that pony was at the moment.

"You ride, then?" exclaimed Gorman. "O, I wish you would let me train a horse for you. I have a lovely young thing coming home next week that would just suit you. Dark

brown, with black legs; though full of spirit, gentle as a lamb; a mouth soft as a lady's hand; you might ride him with a silken thread. Do let me train him for you—I should feel so proud and happy.”

“Thank you, Mr. Muir,” said Berna, who felt really touched by his eager earnestness. “It is very kind of you; but I never rode except with papa; and I do not suppose I shall ever ride again. We are very poor now, you know,” she added, with that unconscious pride which so often apes humility; “and we are never likely to be anything else.”

“I hope you are greatly mistaken,” Gorman began; but he could add no more, for at that moment the horse turned into the lane where Clear Stream Cottage was situated, and finding its head was set towards Ardilaw, improved its pace so suddenly, that Gorman found he had much ado to pull him up at the rustic gate, where some one, whose head was enveloped in a shawl, stood waiting.

“Who is that?” asked Mrs. Boyle—for it was, indeed, the widow—as the conveyance stopped.

“It is I—Berna—mamma,” answered the girl, springing down into the mud before Gorman could select a dry spot for her to descend. “I hope you have not been uneasy about me.”

“Much you care about my uncasiness, miss,” retorted Mrs. Boyle. “Keeping me out here till this time of night, catching my death of cold, and breaking my heart thinking you had got murdered or robbed, and were lying in some ditch, only to be brought home stiff and stark, as your father was. Ah! it's well seen which parent you take after—not a bit of thought for anybody but yourself. And now, will you please to say where you've been all the day long, and who it is that is standing there?”

“Only Gorman Muir, Mrs. Boyle,” explained that young man, coming forward and taking off his hat. “My father saw Miss Boyle sheltering at Ardilaw; and, as he would not hear of her walking home, I took the liberty of driving her back

myself. I hope and trust she will be none the worse for being out in such dreadful weather."

"O Mr. Muir," exclaimed the widow, "I never can return you sufficient thanks! I am sure I feel most grateful both to you and your father. If I don't die of standing here with nothing but this shawl about my head—and, indeed, it was always considered I would go into a decline on account of the beautiful colour in my cheeks—I'll remember your kindness to the last day of my life. There's not many would have given themselves so much trouble about a young slip of a girl who hasn't as much sense as would carry a snipe across a bog. Come inside, Mr. Muir. Don't be stopping out there making a stranger of yourself—and you such a friend and all. What's that you say?—the horse won't stand? Well, well, more's the pity; and not a stable, or even a byre, about the place to bid you put him up in. It's very good of you, I'm sure, to tell me take care of myself, and not be staying in the night air; but as I've stopped so long fretting myself to death about Berna, a minute or two more can't make any difference. Hadn't she best get in beside the fire? Yes, that she had. She'll be all for taking care of herself. I am sure if I gave way as she does I might be ordering my coffin every week. You see!—she's gone with hardly good-night to you. It is a trial to a woman when she sees her child growing up as different from herself as darkness is from light. Well, if you *must* go, Mr. Gorman, though I'd have been more than pleased if you could have come in and had an air of the fire."

"You are kindness itself," returned the young man; "but I really must be making the best of my way back to Ardilaw. If, however, you would allow me to call to-morrow to inquire how you and Miss Boyle are after this evening's exposure, I should esteem it a great favour."

"Come, and welcome," answered the widow. "I'm sure in this wilderness—footsore and weary, the Jews never found a worse—it's a comfort to find anybody to tell one's troubles to. And you needn't put yourself out if Berna sits like a marble

statue and never opens her lips. She means no harm. It's just her way ; and a bad way, too, as I've told her, over and over again."

"Good-night, dear Mrs. Boyle. You really must not stand here any longer," and Gorman pressed the widow's outstretched hand warmly in his own.

But for the friendly intervention of the rustic gate Mrs. Boyle might have seized so excellent an opportunity for fainting in the young man's arms. As it was, she only said,

"Come as often as ever you like," adding to herself the comforting assurance, "He's breaking his heart for the want of me." And, as she tripped back along the path, she tossed her little head coquettishly at the thought, "He is just like the rest of them."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I SUPPOSE," said Mr. Muir, to his son next morning, shortly after breakfast, "you'll be for going to Beechfield to-day, and seeing if Miss Garnsey's any the worse for yesterday's rain."

"She was not out in it; but I meant to ride over and inquire how she got home."

"That's right. Civility'll never hurt you; and I'm sure she'll be right well pleased."

Gorman made no direct answer to these statements; his mind was full of another matter.

"And as I come back," he remarked, "I suppose I had better take Clear Stream in my way, and ask after Miss Boyle."

"It would not be amiss," agreed Mr. Muir. "The mother's a good tenant; and though she's just the very craziest old woman I ever did come across, I daresay she is fond of her child through all. I tell you what, Gorman, leave it off till the afternoon, and we can walk over together."

Whether or not this arrangement was one which recommended itself to Mr. Gorman Muir, he assented to the suggestion with a good grace; and about three o'clock father and son set out to pay that visit which Mrs. Boyle arrayed herself to receive hours previously. Berna, knowing pretty well what was coming, had gone for a long walk early in the forenoon. When she saw her mother don fresh cap and best dress, she said she had a headache, and thought the air might do it good.

"Very likely, dear," said Mrs. Boyle, who desired nothing more earnestly than her daughter's absence; "and you need not be hurrying yourself. We'll tell Ruth to put the dinner-

time back an hour, so you can take a fine long turn when you're about it."

Well the girl knew what this meant, and, interpreting her mother's permission in the widest sense, she remained out till she conceived the longest visit must have ended.

When Ruth opened the door Berna looked at her old nurse inquiringly; but Ruth only shook her head. He had not been there, evidently, and the girl's heart sank within her. She was tired, her limbs were weary, and the air had not blown away her headache. She felt low and dispirited, and in no mood to reply cheerfully when Mrs. Boyle exclaimed, "O, here you are! That's well. I told Ruth we'd only have a tray brought in to-day; no call to spread a cloth, there's no knowing who might happen to step in."

"Are you expecting any one, mamma?"

"Not to exactly say expect; but I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Gorman Muir looked in to pass the time of day. He did let fall a word about coming to see I'd got no cold through standing in the night air watching for you. Come now, take off your things as fast as you can, and let us get our dinner over."

"I do not want any dinner," said Berna. "I should like to lie down for an hour. If Mr. Muir does call, I would rather be out of the way."

"There you are again!" exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. "Was there ever such a girl before! Always thinking about yourself, walking till you are tired to death, and then coming home and wanting to be waited on hand and foot. However, go and lie down, it's nothing to me; indeed, when you're well you're not such lively company anybody need break their heart to be without you for a while."

It was something even to have got this permission, and Berna lost no time in availing herself of it. For nearly an hour she lay listening and thinking; but at last she fell into a dreamless sleep. When she awoke, darkness had set in, and Ruth was standing by the bedside with a candle in her hand.

"It's nearly five o'clock, Miss Berna," she said, in an eager whisper. "Mr. Muir and his son have been here this hour and more. They are going to stop for tea, and the mistress has sent me to call you."

In the first moment of waking Berna had raised herself on her elbow, and rubbed her eyes, half blinded with the light. Now she lay down again, sighing heavily. Evidently she felt no wild desire to add another to the festive party in the little sitting-room.

Ruth stood looking at her for a few seconds, every wrinkle in her toil-worn face expressive of the tenderest love and deepest compassion.

What ought her young lady not to have had in the way of wealth and pleasure and society? Well-born, well-bred, well-nurtured, she ought, had things gone as they should, to have been, as her nurse expressed the matter, among the "first in the land; and here she is, through her own free will, chained to a foolish mother but little better than me—worse nor me, indeed, because she hasn't a grain of sense, not enough to know when she's making a town talk of herself."

"I am afraid, miss dear," she said, after that minute's pause, "you'll have to go in among them. The mistress is in one of her humours, and she'll listen to nothing I can tell her. There'll only be a disturbance if you keep away. It's the father wants to see you. I think they've heard as much talk almost as they can stand. It has been going straight on ever since they came in. If your mother had been running about with them since she was two years of age she couldn't be freer or more friendly. It's a burning shame, and I'll tell her so, once they're gone, whether she's pleased or displeased; but you'd best get up now—you had indeed. I'll just let them know you're coming, and then I'll slip back and do up your hair. O dear, O dear!" added poor Ruth, *sotto voce*, as she left the room; "to think of my child ever having to demean herself by going among the like of them! It's enough to make the poor master rise from his grave."

Ten minutes later, with the flush of sleep still tinging her cheeks, Berna walked along the passage, pausing for a moment at the parlour-door ere entering the room.

Talk—that is, Mrs. Boyle’s talk—was still in full progress. The widow seemed in the height of her glory; she had got her audience, who were receiving as scant mercy as the Ancient Mariner showed to that unhappy wedding guest.

At the moment when Berna stood still, holding the handle in her trembling fingers, Mrs. Boyle was in full cry across country, giving an account of her husband’s death. “Though I did everything short of going down on my bended knees to him, he would ride that chestnut, which was one of the wickedest brutes in all Mayo. Well, and as I was saying—”

At that juncture Berna entered, a brilliant colour mantling in her cheeks, her eyes bright with feverish excitement, her heart sick with shame and sorrow, every nerve in her body in a state of tension.

As if a ghost had suddenly appeared before her, Mrs. Boyle stopped dead in her narrative.

“So you’ve come at last!” she exclaimed. “I am sure I don’t know what Mr. Muir must think of you.”

What Mr. Muir really thought was that he saw before him a very beautiful young girl; and as he took Berna’s cold hand in his, he verbally expressed something of this idea. The man meant no offence: it was only his nature; but Gorman could see that Berna shrank a little more into herself as he spoke.

“Miss Boyle is not accustomed to such compliments,” he said, with an uneasy laugh.

“Isn’t she?” returned the farmer. “She’ll get used to them after a bit, from some more likely person than me.”

“She’s far too young for anything of that sort,” broke in Mrs. Boyle.

“Is she, now? I shouldn’t have thought it,” observed Mr. Muir, surveying Berna in a way which dyed her face with a still deeper crimson. “But never mind me, miss; it was only my joke; all I meant was, you’re a very fine young woman,

though your mother, as is natural, will have it you're still but a child."

"I hope you did not take any cold yesterday, Miss Boyle," said Gorman.

"Cold!" repeated the widow. "What would make her take cold? Your father and you took too good care of her for that; well wrapped and driven home, while I was fretting myself to death out in the damp night air, wondering what had become of her."

"And you ought to pay more heed to yourself than stand out in the night air at your time of life," said Mr. Muir, who had no idea of founding any pleasing fiction on the fact of his tenant's age.

"I don't know what you mean about my time of life," answered Mrs. Boyle. "Trouble makes us all look old, but it can't make anybody really old. If I hadn't married younger than that girl there, and taken the weight of the world on myself before I was well out of the nursery—"

"You couldn't have looked better than you do," finished Mr. Muir, laudably anxious to conciliate. "It's not many that have come through as much could have kept the girl's figure you have, and been as light on your feet as yourself. Why, there's my eldest daughter Bell wants a month or two yet of being six-and-twenty, and I declare to my conscience she looks an old woman beside you."

"It's the mind does it, Mr. Muir," said the widow, in gracious explanation. "It's the mind. As my poor father used to say, 'You'll be a girl, Milly, till you are eighty year old.' I take after him; he was the merriest soul. The very morning as he died in the evening he was lirting out, 'The night before Larry was stretched,' and making us all screech with laughing. Ah, there's not many left like him."

"I remember him well," Mr. Muir remarked. "He was a short stout man, red-faced, with a squint. He'd put away many a tumbler of punch in his time, or I'm much mistaken. His nephew does not favour him much."

"No, that he doesn't," agreed Mrs. Boyle; "there's but little fun about Richard Vince. Not that I've a word to say against him. We can't all be pleasant and heartsome alike; and, maybe, it's not Richard's fault altogether that the cares of riches have been a yoke round his neck and a burden to his feet, as the Bible talks about."

Gorman Muir looked at the speaker in amazement. He had never previously conceived of such a woman as Mrs. Boyle. That she could be Berna's mother seemed to him monstrous. His own father might be, and was, objectionable; but at least no one could say he was a fool.

"She ought to be glad to marry me," he thought, "to get away from this;" and then he turned to Berna, who, with averted face, was gazing steadily into the fire, only to feel the girl's nature held something in it he might find it difficult exactly to understand.

"Stir yourself, now, Berna," commanded Mrs. Boyle, "and give Mr. Muir a cup of tea. I hope you'll make yourselves at home," she proceeded, with gracious hospitality; "we oughtn't to be like strangers to one another. Here's some apple jelly I made myself after we came to Clear Stream. Though I say it, I don't think you'd find better coloured in the county. When I was a girl I always did get praise for my preserves. As I often tell Berna there, she'll be a poor useless creature if ever she comes to have a house of her own."

"Maybe she'll not need to look after anything of the kind," suggested Mr. Muir.

"It's to be hoped she won't, indeed. If she's to see to much, I pity the man who gets her. She hasn't the least notion of making things comfortable; and as for conversation, you might as well expect it from a mute."

"Mamma is determined you shall not remain in ignorance of my faults, Mr. Muir," said Berna, trying to smile.

"You see," answered that gentleman, "when one in a house has heaps of talk, it is as well there is somebody knows how to hold her tongue. What do you think you'd

do, Mrs. Boyle, if your daughter had as much to say as yourself?"

"I'd be thankful, I am sure. Many's the time and often I sit wondering what'll become of the girl when I am dead and gone, and she has nobody to speak up for her. To see me so lively and cheerful, you would never believe the amount of thought I have in me. And I need it all, too; for goodness only knows what would happen if I wasn't always considering something."

It was at this point Berna determinedly struck across her mother's monologue. Turning to Gorman, she asked him about Finney's Farm—if he had really decided to take it; whether he did not think the risk too great. Astonished, Mr. Muir noticed the quick nervous decision of her manner; the resolute way in which she prevented any further exhibition of folly.

"There's a heap in her," he thought; "I wonder, now, whether it's bad or good?"

"You'll give us a song after a while, Miss Boyle, won't you?" he said. "It'll be long before I forget what you sang yesterday."

"I have a quantity of new music, if you would care to look at it," Gorman ventured; "some good duets, and—"

"Duetts!" thought Berna, horrified. "Thank you," she answered, with that new manner which so surprised Mr. Muir; "but I never sang any duets excepting with papa, and I do not think I shall ever sing any again."

"Did you ever hear anything like her?" inquired Mrs. Boyle. "You might think no one had ever lost a father before."

"No one could have been fonder of a father," said Berna, with a dangerous flash in her eyes. No, never again, she determined, would she sit quiet and hear the dead spoken of as she had done. "What should you like, Mr. Muir?" she asked, rising and going towards the piano, which was, indeed, an old instrument discarded from the schoolroom at Craig-

vallen ; and she sang a couple of songs, while Mrs. Boyle giggled and chattered in audible whispers to the younger man.

"Give us something now with a bit of life in it, Berna," said the widow at last. "'Young Lochinvar,' or 'Sandy and the Mermaid,' or 'Allan-a-dale.'"

"'Allan-a-dale' is delightful," remarked Gorman.

"Yes ; let's have 'Allan-a-dale,'" cried Mrs. Boyle. And when her daughter, after some natural hesitation, began that old-world ditty, she was good enough to join in with a high cracked voice, and many a twist and twirl and marvellous cadenza. The way she looked at Gorman and nodded her head, and tapped the floor with her foot, and generally—as Mr. Muir afterwards remarked—went on like a mad woman, was simply indescribable.

"'She was off to the forest to hear a love tale, And the youth it was told by was Allan-a-dale,'" sang the widow, with a triumphant toss of her cap, and a killing glance at Gorman. "That's the sort of tune for me ; none of your die-away heart-broken ballads."

"And you've a fine shrill voice of your own yet, ma'am," said Mr. Muir, in doubtful compliment. "Thank you, Miss Boyle ; it's a real treat to hear anybody able to sing like you. Now, Gorman, if you're ready, we'd best be lessening the distance between here and Ardilaw."

CHAPTER XXV.

"SHE'S not so bad-looking, Gorman," Mr. Muir remarked to his son, after they had proceeded for some short distance in silence.

"Who is not so bad-looking?" asked Gorman.

"That girl, the widow woman's daughter."

"O, Miss Boyle! I thought, perhaps, it was the widow herself you were talking about."

"Trust me for that, lad; I'm not so blind and I'm not so foolish as to bestow much attention on an old woman when a young one's nigh at hand. She's got quiet ways with her, too; but did you ever come across such a hawering idiot as the mother? I declare by my conscience there were times to-night when I didn't know which way to turn my eyes. And the cracked, squealing voice of her, too! Faith, it would be a queer sort of a man, Allan-a-dale, or Allan-a-hill, or Allan-a-anything else, would be if he wanted to meet her when he could help it."

"Certainly I should not care to keep such a forest assignation, but there is no accounting for tastes."

"That's true enough," agreed Mr. Muir, ere he relapsed once again into reverie.

The night was dark and the road bad, and as neither man seemed much disposed for conversation, they had walked more than half-way home ere Mr. Muir again spoke. Evidently he had been turning over some knotty subject in his mind.

"I wouldn't wonder," he at last began, "if there was a touch of consumption about that girl."

"What girl?" asked Gorman, who, though he understood, did not care to seem to do so.

“Miss Boyle, to be sure. Who else should I be speaking of? It wouldn't surprise me one bit to hear any day she was gone into a decline. Did you see the colour in her cheeks when she came through the doorway? she might have been painting them; and before five minutes were over they were as white as the candle. That was for all the world the way Carline's cousin used to turn—the picture of health one hour, and the next looking only fit to be measured for her coffin, and it wasn't long before we had to follow hers. She got a chill at the Cultra Regatta, and before we'd the harvest in she was happed up in Holywood churchyard. If that girl was anything to me, I wouldn't feel just easy in my mind about her; though, maybe, she'd be quite as well away from this world as in it, with no one to speak to but that half-cracked old mother.”

Gorman shuddered; his father's words seemed to pierce him like the thrust of a sword. Such a notion had never crossed his mind before, but, now it had been forced upon his thoughts, how should he ever banish it? Berna, his Berna, dead! That fair face hidden away for ever; that sweet voice silenced; that swaying figure cold and still! The man could have cried aloud in his agony. In a moment, the vision of a funeral procession winding slowly from out the door of Clear Stream Cottage, across the dancing rivulet, among the rose-trees, out into the lane, and thence to Dundonald Church, arose before him. It was one of those periods when the mind in imagination passes through a fiercer agony than the worst reality ever brings. He felt the sting of death, without its merciful numbing stupor. From out of life, flushed with health, in the spring-time of existence, in the fulness of her beauty, he beheld his first young love pass instantly through the golden gates, which, closing behind, shut him out from hope and happiness. He could not speak; it is no exaggeration to say he refrained from answer only because he was, for the time being, stricken dumb. But that silence served its purpose better than any speech could have done, for, be-

lieving he was addressing an unsympathetic auditor, Mr. Muir changed the subject of his conversation to Finney's Farm.

"I can't get the notion of leaving that lot of fine young horses up there alone with an old man and a ragamuffin dog," he observed.

"I can," answered Gorman.

"I wish you'd give me some reason for your faith—that is, if you wouldn't mind telling it out."

"But that is exactly what I do mind, very much," replied his son. "You've told me yourself you believed at one time the very grass in the county Down had ears; and there is an old story about Midas and the reeds, which, like many other old stories, holds a lesson. I am not going to talk about Finney's Farm—or Sunnyside Farm, as I mean to call it—out here, at any rate. Doey has done well by me so far, and I intend to trust him further."

"I have nothing to say against the man; only if some morning you walked up the hill and found some of your best stock maimed, and Doey stiff with a bullet in his head, you wouldn't be best pleased."

"No, faith; but if ever such a thing should come to pass, there will be a job for the hangman at the next assizes. I swear that, and I don't care who hears me. Now, we've had quite enough about death and dying, I think, for one night; and, if you are of my opinion, we'll push on and get to the fire. What with your pleasant talk concerning the two curses of Ireland, consumption and cowardice, and the wet of these confounded roads, I am fairly shivering."

"If you meant that shot about cowardice for me, you fired wide," said Mr. Muir. "I'm no more a coward than yourself; but I do count it foolhardy for a man to walk straight into a road where he is likely to be knocked over like a rabbit."

"I won't let either fear or threats prevent my walking along any road I have got to travel," retorted Gorman hotly. "For the rest, I never said or thought you were a coward. Only it seems to me, people cannot be very brave when a whole

country-side agrees to let a farm lie idle because a few lazy vagabonds declare no one shall till it."

"Well, well, you mustn't blame me, no matter what comes to pass."

"If your pleasing prophecy proves correct, I shall not be here to blame you," replied his son. "Ere many days are over I think I'll go up and share Doey's hut, so that no harm may come to you through my self-will. I don't want the Ardilaw ship to founder because such a Jonah as myself happens to be among the company."

"I'll chance that," answered the farmer. "If we're to be set light to, you'd best be close at hand, maybe, to help put out the flames. All the same, though, I wish any other piece of land would have served your turn. You might have had Kilmoon and welcome."

"I did not want Kilmoon."

"I know you didn't; and that's what fairly beats me. Why you should take up with a few acres on a bare hillside, when the richest bit of land in the parish is offered to you, passes my comprehension."

"Kilmoon is six times dearer."

"And six times better soil."

"Soil doesn't signify to me."

"More's the pity."

"Besides, I had set my heart on Finney's Farm."

"There ought to be some sense in what you set your heart on."

"I am afraid you will find there is neither sense nor reason in most of the things a man like myself takes a notion of."

"That is just what I am beginning to be afraid of myself."

"You see, sir, you can't live my life for me."

"And I'm very sure I wouldn't wish to live it for you if I could."

"Well, well, for mercy's sake don't let us quarrel. I want to get home; I'm chilled to my bones."

"Something has gone wrong with you to-night, Gorman. I wonder what it is?"

"Is not walking up to the knees in mud enough to try the temper of any man? I wonder, seeing the magnificent roads they have in Antrim, you Down folk are not ashamed of the metal you lay down. It grinds fairly into pulp."

"That's been the way ever since Mr. Desmond forced them to pull all the turnpikes down."

"How did he force them?"

"He wouldn't pay toll, and it wasn't likely anybody else would. He went clean over the Newtonards Bar, horse and dog-cart, and groom and himself. He was a Justice of the Peace, and he spent his life trying legally to break the law. One day in Belfast he was driving a pair through Donegall Place, and one of them, being a trifle skittish, got on the side-path. Well, they had him up, and inflicted a fine, and he went away. A month later what does he do but goes into town with a four-in-hand—three horses and an ox—and may I never stir, but he drove the length of High Street, in the busiest part of the day, with the horses in the road and the ox on the kerb. There was nothing in the Corporation by-laws then providing against such a thing; and he laughed at the police. No matter what he did after that, nobody interfered with him."

"What an agreeable person!"

"He was pleasant enough to speak to, but hard—just the reverse of his son Cornelius. They say it broke his heart to see Corny light a second candle one night when there was company. Here's Ardilaw, at last."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Gorman.

"And I see Carline's kept up a fine fire in your sitting-room."

"Carline is worth her weight in gold."

"That's saying a deal for any woman. But there's worse than Carline."

"There are, faith; and we needn't go out of Ardilaw to find them."

Which retort so confirmed Mr. Muir's notion concerning

something having "put Gorman out" that he decided it might be wise to hold his peace.

They were met on the threshold by Carline, her hair a little tossed, her face somewhat scorched, her manner bright and excited. Gorman looked at her, and again his heart sank within him. His thoughts recurred to the cousin who had caught cold at Cultra Regatta, and he wondered if all beauty in woman was to be regarded but as death's sign manual. In that soft deceitful climate were all things fair and tender created only for the grave?

"Come in," she exclaimed, "and see the fire I've built up for you. I made Peter fetch in a great basket of turf, and it's all of a glow. He wouldn't stop to see you, he said he had nothing worth speaking about. O, and he bade me give you the cutting whip you left up there. He was afraid you might think you had lost it."

"Thank you, Carline; I am glad to see it again;" and Gorman took the little gold-mounted whip in his hand and slashed the air, as a lad might have done.

"You set great store by that," said Mr. Muir, the strongest passion in whose strong nature was jealousy.

"I do. It was a present."

"I thought as much. From some lady, no doubt."

"You are wrong, for once, father. I gave it to myself, with many good wishes, in the days when I was rich enough to make presents. I rejoice to have it in my hand again."

Mr. Muir possessed such excellent sense that he failed to believe one word of this story. Hitherto he had found Gorman truthful to an extent verging on folly; but "a man," argued the farmer, "can't doubt the evidence of his senses." Here was Gorman, who all the way from Clear Stream had been sulky as sulky could be, now laughing and singing like a boy. Clearly the whip had been a love token. Some place there lived a strange woman, who eventually would take his son from him. It was for her sake he wanted to make money fast, and would have nothing to say to Miss Garnsey, and

"most times" went himself to the post for letters. Yes, if once Gorman got "a bit before the world" he should lose him—lose the son he loved as he once thought never to love anything; who was the height of good company when "no mood was on him;" who was something to be proud of, to think about, to plan with, and plot for.

Such a change as came over Gorman from the time he entered Ardilaw, Mr. Muir decided, was never beheld. He joked with Bell about her sour looks, and did not even draw down his own brows when the farmer suggested that lady might chance, before she was much older, to have Mrs. Boyle for sister instead of mother-in-law. "She's set her cap at Gorman now, and I'm all out in the cold," he exclaimed.

That night Gorman had a pleasant look and word for every one; and before his father went to bed the young fellow, standing in the middle of the old drawing-room, said, "I think, sir, I spoke to you as we were coming home as I ought not to have done, and I want to beg your pardon."

Mr. Muir felt quite taken aback; his heart swelled with emotion. Rudeness, quarrelling, and cold self-consideration had so entirely ruled his home that Gorman's unintelligible pettishness and impetuous repentance filled his heart with a sensation as new as strange.

"Tuts, that's nothing," he exclaimed; "don't imagine that though you are my son, I forget you are a grown man and have a right to your own notions. The only thing troubles me is that I often think we don't rightly understand one another. There's many a way I might help you, if I only knew betimes you wanted help."

"Perhaps," said Gorman doubtfully.

"Well, I'll try to get some sleep now, at any rate. I want to go to the town early to-morrow. Don't be vexing yourself about me. When you give me a sore heart I'll tell you, never fear."

"I trust I never may; I trust in God I never may!" answered his son earnestly.

"Then likely you'll tell me some day why you set such store by the cutting whip."

"Yes; that I will," and Gorman broke into a ringing laugh. "Good-night, father; pleasant dreams. I am not going to bed for a long time yet, so if you hear any noise you'll know I'm making it."

"Good-night," said Mr. Muir, with a nod. He had never, in all the fifty years of his life, arrived at that stage of conventional affection which induces members of a family, living under the same roof, to shake hands on meeting and parting, and he felt shy about beginning such a practice.

When he was once more alone, Gorman again took up the cutting whip and looked at it with a satisfied smile.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OVER Ardilaw the very genius of Silence seemed keeping mute watch. Not a sound broke the stillness. It was a night when nor bird nor beast appeared wakeful ; not a twig stirred, not a dead leaf fell. The stones in the river might have been thick with moss, so muffled was the flow of the water. In the out-buildings Mr. Muir's cattle were sleeping quietly ; even the wild birds lay close in their hiding-places. The darkness suggested the idea that it was holding its breath to listen for the coming of some catastrophe. Out from the room where Carline's turf fire, more than once replenished since she lifted her lovely face for her brother's parting kiss, was burning low Gorman stepped as though shod with velvet. For two or three minutes he stood at the foot of the wide staircase listening intently. Throughout the old house there reigned silence, utter, complete. The very mice that night went about their business gingerly.

Satisfied that every one was at rest, Gorman passed back into the sitting room he had just left, exchanged his slippers for a pair of stout shooting-boots, fastened on strong serviceable leggings, buttoned a rough top-coat across his chest, put on a glengarry cap, looked carefully to the priming of a pair of pistols which he thrust into one deep pocket, dropped a flask, containing whisky, undiluted, into the other, and thus provided against all contingencies of weather, time, and danger, once more stole out into the hall, opened noiselessly the heavy oaken door, which he locked from the outside, carrying the key off with him, and keeping close under the sullen shadow thrown by the house that made the darkness well-nigh impenetrable, he made his way down to the stream at a point nearer Ardilaw than that once chosen by Carline for her meet-

ing with the Ensign. Here a couple of trunks of trees, roughly shorn of their branches, had been thrown across the water, and over these Gorman made his way to the opposite bank. Arrived there, he proceeded up stream, still taking heed to his steps, and availing himself of such shelter as the nut-bushes and other undergrowth afforded, as much as possible avoiding the open, and, where the lower path was practicable, never venturing up on the higher ground. With stealthy caution he thus pursued his course till he reached Finney's Farm. Then, feeling his way over some great stones placed in the bed of the river, he recrossed to the south-east bank.

There he paused; and, imitating exactly the flop and scurry of a water-rat suddenly surprised, listened. From the direction of the house which had been burnt down came the peevish yap-yapping of a dog, barking for very irritation at having been disturbed out of sound sleep. That sound died away, and was followed by the whirr-r-r of a pheasant. Gorman waited about half a minute after that ere, still neglecting no precaution, he climbed the bank, and, under cover of a ditch surmounted by a hedge of straggling thorn, struck as straight as possible for the enclosure where his young horses were nightly sheltered.

This enclosure owed its origin partly to the ingenuity and greatly to the selfishness of Mr. Peter Doey. Having made up his mind that taking service with young Muir would insure various pecuniary advantages to himself, he determined that—seeing furthering his master's interests was likely to advance his own—no stone should be left unturned which could possibly insure success to the new venture.

"And where am I to stop, sorr," he asked, after Gorman had unfolded a vague plan for housing his young cattle, "airly and late as I'd need to be on the ground?"

"O, you might find a lodging almost anywhere close at hand, I should think," conjectured Gorman.

"Yes; or I mightn't. When a man is expected to give his whole thought to one matter, it's half the battle for him to be

able to think that thought without disturbance. You don't know, master, the power of consideration I can get through if I can have peace to smoke my pipe, without having the heart broke in me by a scolding woman and a lot of crying babbies. You let me rig up a shanty for myself inside those four bare walls—a few boards and a barrowful of straw won't ruin you—and I'll plan a yard for the colts and another for the older and steadier creatures, God bless them all! and then I'll be myself in the middle of them like Noah in his ark, and devil one of the lot will lift a hoof or give a cough but me and Sniff will know the reason."

Thus it came to pass that Mr. Doey now resided upon the premises. In the west window of his hut there shone, as Gorman beheld from afar, a steady light, not fierce, but subdued—the sort of light which might keep in all night, and which, in fact, Mr. Doey was in the habit of so keeping. A white blind was drawn across the glass, but no shadow could be seen reflected on it; apparently the house was closely shut up for the night; even the sleepless Sniff gave no sign of life.

Cautiously Gorman trod softly along by the railings of the enclosure, formed of unbarked young fir-trees split in two, till he came to a gate, which opened for his entrance and closed after him as if by magic; then a hand was laid on his arm, and Peter guided him to a shed hard by, into which both men passed noiselessly.

"They'll be nigh at hand now," whispered Doey; "sit down on the hay."

"My gun," said Gorman, in the same low tone.

"Here she is, ready loadened. Don't fire her till I give Sniff the word, and then, for the Lord's sake, aim low."

"You're sure, Doey, the charge is all right? Wouldn't it be safer to draw it and reload?"

"Tits!" was the contemptuous reply. "Now don't be fretting about the gun. She's all right. Lay your hand on Sniff's back, and you'll know when they're in the meadow, though you can't hear a beetle rustling."

Gorman, thus admonished and directed, laid his hand on the dog, who was apparently plunged in refreshing slumber. For five minutes—ten—fifteen—an unbroken silence prevailed; then, suddenly, he became conscious of a creeping of Sniff's skin, and knew the animal had raised his head, and cocked one vagabond ear.

"Quiet," muttered Peter, in a lengthened drawl. "It's you, sorr," he added, "throws the poor brute out. Don't touch him any more. They're coming."

Yes, they were coming. Young Muir rather felt than heard their approach; and, rising, took his gun, and, peering out into the night, waited Doey's signal.

Gorman felt his excitement rising to an almost uncontrollable extent. He could hear Sniff's panting breathing, and through the darkness was able to distinguish the figures of two men. They went straight up to the hut Doey had erected inside the burnt house, and knocked, at first gently, then more loudly.

"Be ready, sorr," whispered Doey, lifting his own gun.

"Oughtn't we to challenge them?" said Gorman.

"Challenge be damned!" retorted Doey, at the same time striking the ground with his foot.

Instantly Sniff flew out, barking furiously.

"Whatever you do, no higher nor their legs;" and, so saying, Doey ran forward with a wild shout of defiance. At the same moment he fired both barrels, and, as a yell of pain and surprise broke the stillness, another report followed. This time there came only a curse; and Gorman, pulling out his pistols, was about to rush towards the men, who were now in full retreat, when Doey held him back, exclaiming, "No murder, sorr! God preserve you, Mr. Gorman, keep quiet. What they've got will do for them this while. No, you sha'n't. If you want to shoot somebody, shoot me, or Sniff. What the —— is that?" he broke off to exclaim, as a loud shout of "Help! help!" rang out across the night.

In one second Gorman was over the fence and flying in

the direction whence the sound came, with Sniff, hounded on by his master, joyously leading the van, while Doey himself hurried after at a speed of which no one could have supposed him capable.

"Are you hurt?" he cried, helping Gorman to raise a man who was stretched full length on the sward. "Speak, whoever you are. What's wrong with you?"

"It's my father," said Gorman. "See to him while I go after those scoundrels."

"Just see to him yourself," retorted Doey. "What call had he coming where he wasn't wanted? Nobody could have hurt him if he hadn't put himself forward; and as for those scoundrels, as you call them, I know where they'll be to be found to-morrow if you want them. If the calves of their legs are smarting now, they'll be smarting worse in the morning. That's right, sorr, give him a sup of whisky; he's only shook a bit. He'll be as well as ever in a minute. Lean on me, Mr. Muir. It was the throw you got, wasn't it?—ay, I deemed as much. Lean heavier, sorr; put your full weight on me. Don't be a hair afeared; I'll not go over with you. Now, Mr. Gorman, pull yourself together; your father's worth a dozen dead ones yet—aren't you, Mr. Muir? You'll live to bury all of us, maybe. Here, Sniff, hie home, my lad. Heth and feth, if he hasn't the sense of all the Christians in the parish."

Still feeling dizzy and confused, with a vague wonder as to how he came to be walking in the middle of the night down the hill leading to Ardilaw supported by his son and Peter Doey, Mr. Muir eventually found himself tottering along his own back avenue, crossing his own stable-yard, entering his kitchen, and speculating, in a dreamy sort of way, what Bell would find to remark about the mud three men's boots were capable of leaving upon the floor.

"We'll have him up to bed now, Mr. Gorman," said Doey, whose experience both in matters of accident and of drunkenness might be considered exhaustive; and, acting on this suggestion, Mr. Muir was, as Peter expressed the matter, "con-

voyed" up-stairs, only to be confronted with the awful apparition of Miss Isabella in nightgown and nightcap.

Mrs. Caudle herself could not have presented a more terrifying spectacle.

"I'd like to know—" she was beginning, when Gorman cut across her speech.

"Should you?" he said; "then you won't know to-night. Some one must sit up with my father. Shall I call Carline?"

"Certainly not, so long as I am mistress in the house," answered Bell.

"Ah! and it's not here you'd be stopping long, miss, if some I know had their own way," murmured Peter, with rapturous admiration.

"Does that man want any drink?" asked Miss Muir.

"If he does, I can give it to him," said Gorman. "Thank you, Doey," he added, "I couldn't have got my father into bed as you've done. Now come down-stairs with me. There's hot water about the house some place, I suppose; the kitchen fire is never to say out, and—"

"Give me a drop, master, without any water at all, just as much as you could cock your finger over. What's that you're saying, sorr? Will I stop here, or will you go with me? Ha, ha! It's little you know of Peter yet. Just turn in where you are, and have a good sound sleep yourself, Mister Gorman, and I'll take my old bones up the hill and have an hour or two there. Won't I be afraid? Ah, there, get along with you, do! Now, wait till I tell you, and mind what I'm saying. This blessed night as ever was we've scotched the last snake on Finney's Farm. You go to Beechfield to-morrow morning and take a lease of the land. *Get a promise in writing from Garnsey. I know him.* Nobody'll ever trouble you again. They'll be laughed out of the county. Leave it all to me. I know how to deal with them."

"But, good heavens! Doey, men with that amount of shot in their legs must feel revengeful."

"Devil a shot, Mr. Gorman! *I loadened with bay salt!*"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"TURN your head a bit, Mr. Gorman; a trifle more to the left, sorr. You see that gap in the ditch? Well, it was just out in the road there Tony Morrison met his death. I was standing here at the very minute. I helped to pick him up."

"Ay, indeed; and how did that happen? was he murdered? Had *he* taken land over anybody's head?"

"Murdered? Bless your heart, no, sorr; and as for land, he neither let nor took it. He lived in his own house, as his father and grandfather had lived before him; and there was a meadow or two about it, and a garden and stable-yard, and all befitting. He wasn't a farmer, either gentleman or working. He had a good income of his own, and was well liked through all the county."

"What killed him, then?" asked Gorman.

"I'm coming to that, your honour. As I tell you, I saw his last hour, and he'd no more thought it was at hand than you have this blessed minute."

"How did he die?"

"I was going to tell you. He was a fine rider; he was a finer rider—if that were possible—I think, even than yourself. I don't mean to say he had your gait in the saddle, but he had as good a grip of his horse; and, faith, he never saw the leap that frightened him. As I stand here, I can't help thinking how, with the best horse that ever was shod, it's often just a step from the stirrup to the grave."

"In a word, I suppose Mr. Morrison was thrown at last."

"Faith, he was that, and in the queerest way. Himself and Mr. Cornelius Desmond were coming back from the Maze races, and they had been trotting gently till after they passed

that bridge beyond, when Desmond says to Morrison, says he, 'Corne, let's see which of us 'll be at the turning to Knock graveyard first.'

'Ah! I'll be that,' says Morrison, laughing; and he clips his mare (she was a beauty) with his heels, and away they both went. Well, it's a clean good bit of road, as you see, Mr. Gorman, and they both tore along, the thuds of their horses' hoofs sounding clear through the air, as your own might do. In the field below us there were some pigs feeding, and one of them, likely frightened by the noise, just as they were passing, ran out into the road, and partly across it. Desmond's horse was about half a length behind, and just missed the creature; but it got among the legs of Mr. Morrison's mare, and in one second they were all down—Morrison pitched clean out of the saddle twenty feet ahead, and the mare and the pig all jumbled up together. We ran as hard as we could—Mat Lupus was with me—and we got into the road just as Mr. Desmond stopped his horse, for they were going so fast it wasn't possible for him to pull up sooner.

'When we came to the place where Morrison was lying, we found a pool of blood, and him in the middle of it, with the poor dumb brute licking him. Many a time I've thought about that since, master; many and many's the time. The creature that couldn't speak knew something was wrong, and there she stood licking him like a Christian, as much as to say, 'Show me how I can help you, and I'll do it.'"

"His neck was broken, I suppose?" suggested Gorman, and his voice sounded a little hoarse, for the incident had touched him, as the story of an animal's faithful affection always must touch a heart which, however wayward, is brave and tender.

"No, it wasn't," answered Peter. "The force his head came on the hard ground killed him. I think I hear the thud of it now while I am talking to you. Ay, both Mat and me heard that above the noise of Desmond's horse galloping like mad. The life was still in him when we lifted him up. He

didn't die till night ; but he never spoke nor moved again. Faith, as Mr. Desmond said, and the tears were in his eyes when he spoke the words, 'Morrison was at the turn to Knock graveyard first. Ay, and in his grave, too !' We buried him three days after in the family vault up there, where the Morrisons have been lying snug and quiet for generations. That was a funeral, I can tell you. The following stretched from the Newtonards Road up to the very churchyard gates. You never saw such a sight. It was like the day of judgment. If the dead had risen there couldn't have been a greater crowd than was that afternoon in Knock graveyard ; the ground was black with people, every man standing bare-headed ; and the lough, and the Antrim hills, and the woods about Stormont, and the green sloping country down by Holywood, framed, in a manner, by the old arched window, that hasn't had as much glass as you could see an eclipse of the sun through, in it within the memory of man. You've never been up at Knock graveyard, have you, Misther Gorman ? Ah ! it would be well worth your while to take a walk to it this minute, if only to look at what's to be seen through that arched window. If you like, I'll step up there with you, and show you where Morrison was buried. It's a fine heartsome place. There's always some sort of wind stirring among the headstones."

This alluring description apparently so captivated Gorman's fancy, that he agreed to Mr. Doey's proposal ; and the pair accordingly walking their horses, passed along the lane Mr. Morrison had proposed to reach first, till they came to the avenue leading to Knock graveyard. Up the hill they slowly wound, and when the gates which stand so hospitably wide were reached, tied their cattle to some railings, where the creatures could reach the short sweet grass growing beside the solemn way that led but to the grave, and entered the lonely burial-ground. Old monuments, stones all on one side, mounds which the turf had already covered, heaps of rough clay piled above the last home of the lately dead ; a few shrubs, probably self-planted, growing wild. To the west, a

belt of trees ; and on all other sides views of mountain and sea, and grassy hills, and waving woods, and rich cultivated land. As he reached the crest of the mound Gorman paused and drew a long deep breath of surprise and admiration. In a moment the whole enchanted scene lay stretched before him : the blue treacherous lough, calm as a millpond ; the bold Antrim coast, mountain merging into mountain ; the softer beauty of Down—green slopes, thick woods, eternal undulation.

"It is most beautiful !" he exclaimed.

"Step this way, and look at it through the arch," said Peter, with the pride of a showman ; and then he stopped, as suddenly as his companion.

Leaning against one of the mullions, gazing with rapt contemplation at the view, stood a girl dressed in black. She had not heard their approach, but remained so still, she might have been one of the dead risen from her last narrow resting-place to take a final survey of so beautiful a world.

Gorman did not speak ; but Doey could see the blood rushing up into his dark face, and an eager tender expression lying in the depths of his sunny brown eyes.

"It's Miss Boyle," said the man in a whisper.

"Hush !" answered Gorman ; but already Berna had turned her head, and saw that she was not alone.

The girl did not advance to meet young Muir, but in one moment he was by her side. Peter saw the meeting, and, turning a little aside, smiled to himself.

"I'll not spoil sport," he murmured. Then he plucked a spine off a young fir-tree close at hand, and ate it with great relish. "I always 'evened' that was how the land lay," proceeded Peter, in silent colloquy. "I wonder now if she's got a notion of him ? Why wouldn't she, though ? If she travelled Ireland through she couldn't meet a finer figure of a man." Having arrived at which stage in his argument, Mr. Doey gathered another fir-spine, which he munched as he might had it been salad.

He had barely finished this light repast before the sound, not of footsteps—for the tread of those who walk over the silent dead makes no louder echo than the tenants lying beneath the sod—but of voices, warned him Berna and his master were close at hand. He turned, and, touching his hat, said to the latter, "This is the vault, sorr. It was down them very steps six gentlemen carried the coffin. I'll never forget the sight, never till the day of my death. A king could scarce have had a grander following."

"Who was it?" asked Berna; for though speaking to Gorman, Doey's eyes had appealed to her as he spoke.

"Mr. Morrison, Miss Boyle; a man thought well of by rich and poor. He met his death on the old Dundonald Road out by, as I was telling Mr. Muir. No better rider ever tightened a horse's girth. He had no more thought of death than you have this minute. Me and another were watching him coming along laughing and galloping like mad, when, before you could have clapped hands, he was out of the saddle for the last time; his mare down, too, with her knees cut to bits, on the top of a beast of a pig that fouled her. But what have I said wrong, miss? I am sure I—"

"Hold your tongue, you fool!" commanded Gorman. "If you hadn't been so much taken up with your confounded story, you would have seen I was making signs for you to stop. Did you never hear how her father met his death?" And the young man rushed after Berna, who had drawn down her veil, and was hurrying over the uneven surface of the desolate graveyard.

Very philosophically Doey regarded the retreating figures. Ere again helping himself to fir, he observed aloud,

"No, Mr. Gorman, I never did hear how her father came by his death; and maybe it was just as well, for now you've got another chance. There's nothing a woman, young or old, likes better nor a good cry, if there's a likely man at hand to help wipe up her tears. Faith, and it's myself 'll be looking for half-a-crown, anyway, if you make the use of your time you

might do. Well, I expect I'd best be moving. Neither of you'll be back here to-day, or I'm much mistaken. There, may I never ! if that masterful brute hasn't slipped his bridle off ! O, you contrary divil !—stand still !—would you, now ? Stand still when I bid you ; d'ye hear what I'm saying ? Do you know who it is spaking to you ? Gorman Muir himself's not more headstrong than you. Come, I'm not going to put up with your nonsense any longer ; open your mouth this minute. I don't want to look at your teeth. There, there ; gently, gently. Man alive ! I wouldn't hurt you, not for a thousand pounds counted down in golden guineas. We're the best friends alive, aren't we, old chap ?" and having, with such and suchlike soothing professions of love and confidence, contrived to get the bridle on again, Mr. Doey, in view of further complications which might ensue if the horse were left to his own devices, began walking him up and down, till Gorman should return.

The young man was not long ; he breasted the hill with a quick, free step, and as he drew near, Peter saw something in his face which conveyed the assurance matters had not gone wholly wrong.

"I am sure I beg the young lady's pardon, Mister Gorman," he said, while holding the stirrup. "Maybe I oughtn't to have made so free ; but I didn't know, and I don't know now, the way Mr. Boyle came to leave his wife a widow. How could I tell, sorr, he hadn't died in his bed, like most of the quality ?"

"No, Peter, you couldn't," was the answer ; "and I am sorry to have spoken to you so roughly. Mr. Boyle went out one morning on a chestnut horse as wild as a buck, that reared so high it went right over, with its rider under, crushing him cruelly. That was how he died, Doey ; and naturally your talk about Mr. Morrison brought the whole thing back to his daughter's mind. She was there, and saw it all."

"I wish I'd bitten my tongue out, your honour, before I vexed as pleasant a young lady as ever anybody need wish to

speech to. It's no wonder she looks mournful like. However, please God, the good time's all to come to her. I was speaking at the post-office the other morning to the servant they have up at Clear Stream ; and if Miss Berna, as they call her, had been a saint, she couldn't have said more in her praise than she did. She'll be making a big marriage one of these days."

Gorman did not answer ; he only took his horse a little better in hand as he rode slowly down the hill. When they reached the cross lane, he pulled up and said, "I wish you'd ride round by the station, and see if any parcel is lying there for me."

"I'll do that, Misther Gorman."

"And, Doey."

"Yes, sorr."

"I have not given you half what I meant to do for that good night's work you did a fortnight ago."

"Never mention that, your honour. I want nothing. It was the height of divarsion to me."

"Here's a trifle more you can keep, at any rate," and Gorman thrust three pound notes into Doey's apparently reluctant fingers. "And don't forget to ask about the parcel," Gorman added, as he turned away.

"Never fear, sorr ; Peter won't forget ;" having uttered which assurance, Peter, with some difficulty, induced his horse to start in the opposite direction from that his master was pursuing.

Once, however, he had turned the corner of the lane and was fairly in the old road, Mr. Doey reined in, and, smoothing Gorman's present across his thigh, looked with rapture at the filthy bits of paper which represented value to the extent of sixty shillings.

"He's off after her," he considered, "and not a parcel of any sort will I find at the station. Well, love's a mighty queer thing, as old Molly Murphy said when her son took up with a 'skelly-eyed' girl, with scarce a dud to her back, and freckled like a turkey's egg."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE are not many persons who are able to grow younger day by day; but Mrs. Boyle contrived to perform this feat entirely to her own satisfaction. The rejuvenation process dated from the evening when Gorman Muir and she "foregathered"—when, stalwart man on one side of a rustic gate, and lovely woman on the other, those few words were exchanged which convinced the widow she had not been mistaken that from the instant Gorman's eyes rested on her fair form he was, to adopt her own expression, "gone."

Till that time, her idea had been to trouble the peace of Muir senior. But after Gorman spoke those soul-thrilling words, "dear Mrs. Boyle," she felt it would be most unkind to the younger man were she to evince any marked preference for his father.

"Indeed, and if I married old Muir we'd be just a laughing-stock," she decided. "Why, strangers would take us for grandfather and grandchild. Once I throw off these black clothes it's more like a girl in her teens I'll be looking than a woman that has buried her husband and seen all the troubles of this wicked world. Come May, I'll have been left a sorrowful widow twelve months; and then I can lighten my mourning a bit. O, it's heathenish to bid a woman with a weight of care in her heart go about the world with two rows of stiff white muslin under her bonnet. And me that black never did 'set'! The first time I ever met Ulick I'd on a pink gown. Well I mind it—seven tucks, no less, there were in the skirt; and he said the colour in my cheeks shamed the dyer's art. I wonder, when he lay on the green sod, with the last breath leaving him, whether he thought of the young wife, who married him for love, that he wasn't leaving a tenpenny piece to

bless herself with? Well, well, a handsomer man than he ever was (and whatever faults Ulick Boyle had, he was personable, and as fine a figure as ever you'd meet in Sackville Street. Didn't I think myself the made woman the night he offered for me? Shall I ever forget that ball at Kegan's, when they had rivers of milk-punch and wine for the asking?) is after me now, and will make a grand lady of me yet. I wish he had more notion of himself. He needn't be so shy, hanging back for fear of offending me when his heart is bursting with the words he's afraid to speak. It's not like as if I was a young child, never had had an offer. Sometimes I think it's Berna's cold, heartless way cows him. It would be natural for him to feel timid about putting division between mother and daughter; and I know she'll never forgive me if I change my name—just as if because I've buried one husband I was never to have another!"

With the fine spring weather Mrs. Boyle put out leaves of youth and gladness, like the trees. Her light step grew lighter, her faded eyes brighter, her complexion clearer, her manner more juvenile. She went singing about the house and warbling as though she had been a nightingale among the laurels and rose-trees surrounding Clear Stream Cottage. She was always urging Berna to pin some knot of colour on her dress.

"All the fretting in the world," she said, "won't bring the dead back again. We've got our lives to live; and, for my part, I don't mean to go on year after year, and year after year, as I have done, miserable and mournful, as if I had murdered Ulick Boyle, like that wicked woman Judith they're always reading about in church. What's that you're saying—the story of Judith is in the Apocrypha? I know that as well as you; but one part of the Bible is as good as another, I hope. It's written for our learning, and if you'd study the ten blessed commandments, and learn to be respectful and obedient to your own mother instead of contradicting her, and putting yourself forward at every turn, it would be more becoming than reading Apocryphas, and things like that."

"O dear ! O dear !" groaned poor old Ruth, as she saw, day by day, how the life was telling upon "her child." "The mistress'll never rest till she frets her into her coffin. Why doesn't the man speak and be done with it ? Why can't he say out he's not coming after the old mother, but the daughter ? I'd tell her myself, only she'd never believe me. Why, it was only yesterday she said she felt light as a feather, and, I thought to myself, no feather could be lighter or foolisher. Anybody but herself might see the change has come on Miss Berna. Why, even Miss Muir asked me the other day what was ailing her : 'She looks,' says Miss Muir, 'as if she hadn't strength to get about.' And, indeed, that's true ; but she'll go on till she drops."

After a long dull winter, Spring at last came smiling upon the earth, her emerald robe spangled with primroses and all the fair fragile flowers that first lift their heads above ground. In the woods, birds were mating and building and twittering, busy as busy could be ; the larch was hanging out its tassels, the willows were covered with catkins, wild anemones carpeted the ground, the streams ran joyously on their way, the landscape was flooded with sunshine, the air was full of that fresh, nameless odour which never greets us save when the sap is rising—but strength seemed as far from Berna as ever. From that day when she took shelter at Ardilaw she began to decline. She did not complain. She made mention of no ailment ; but she felt sometimes as though life were a burden too heavy to bear. Upon her tired brain Mrs. Boyle's incessant babble beat with the weary monotony of a hammer ; the shame, and the trouble, and the sorrow of the widow's insane delusion fretted Berna like a running sore. Rest—save when for a time in fitful sleep she forgot her wretched present, and through dreamland entered once again some scene of past delight—she never knew the meaning of the word. The lonely rambles up the hillsides and across the valley, which she once found so soothing, so efficacious in exorcising the demons of passionate regret and more passionate pride, had been

long relinquished. Walking wearied her ; and even had this not proved the case, she must have abandoned wandering over the country by herself, for, finally, there seemed no spot where Gorman failed to find her. They had met in the most unlikely places—by the Druid's stone, beside the waterfall on the way to Gilnakirk, in Knock graveyard, on the heights above Stormont, on the far-off road leading to the Castlereagh hills, looking down on the Lough from Holywood, or gazing at the distant Gobbins and the blue line indicating the Scotch coast ; wherever Berna was, Gorman, as a rule, found her—the most persistent of lovers, the most modest of wooers—tender, pleading, deferential, yet insistent : the girl could not venture beyond the narrow precincts of her home without encountering a man she wished to avoid, and not even in her home was she able to avoid him. If she stopped in her own room, he remained for hours listening to Mrs. Boyle's even stream of maddening folly, waiting for the footstep which, though tardy, had to come at last, hungering for the sight and voice of the girl he had grown to love to distraction.

There were no means he left untried to win a word from her, yet ice could not have seemed colder, stone more insensible, than Berna Boyle. He told her about his young mother, about Clonmellin, his own boyhood, his uncle's kindness, the loss of fortune he had sustained through treachery, the efforts he was determined to make to regain his former position ; but to all appearance he could not sway the heart of his listener. One day, when Mrs. Boyle had left the room to see to the due preparation of some dainty she knew that "wrong-headed old Ruth would spoil only because she is aware I want it for Gorman," the young man happened to drop a hint to the effect he would be willing so far to sacrifice his own inclinations as to let the widow share her daughter's future home. Instantly Berna turned on him. What she said she never could afterwards quite remember. She only knew her lover sat stunned. During the remainder of the visit he scarcely

uttered a syllable, and when he left his farewell was frigid in its respectful propriety.

"When will you learn to behave yourself?" asked Mrs. Boyle, when the door closed after their visitor. "Am I never to have a friend come but he must be made miserable through your notions? You'd better stop up in your own room altogether, miss, till you come to your senses. Looking down on people better born than any Boyle that ever was—good-looking, and well-mannered, and pleasant! Ah, it's a pity my poor father wasn't living; he'd give you a fine talking to."

"I am tired of it all," said Berna, for once breaking silence. "Why should we associate with the Muirs? why should I, at all events, be compelled to meet them on equal terms?"

"O, indeed! We'll have to try and get you an invitation from the Queen. Nobody lower, I suppose, seems to you good enough to speak to. If I approve of people, that is enough for you. I had to bear enough from your father, without putting up with any nonsense from you."

"I will stay in my room, then," declared Berna.

"Do. I am not aware that any one is so anxious for your society as to want to drag you out of it. Gorman Muir and myself can contrive, I make no doubt, to pass a quarter of an hour, or even more, without your help."

But Mr. Gorman Muir did not seem disposed to try the experiment. For a time his visits ceased altogether, and when he did come, it was but to sing Miss Garnsey's praises. He rode with her, he hunted with her, he walked with her, he drove with her. He went to balls, and picnics, and flower-shows, and concerts in company with Mr. Garnsey and his daughter; he was always at Beechfield, so said local gossip. He was coining money, added the same reliable authority. Mr. Garnsey had given his consent, and the wedding clothes were ordered.

"Now you see what you've done," said Mrs. Boyle to her daughter; "driven away one who wanted to befriend us, and who, as I may say, adored me—yes, you may well put your

hand to your head ; I wonder a judgment does not fall on you for your conduct. They're all gone down together to the salt water. Mr. Garnsey has taken a house at Donaghadee, and young Muir's never but there."

Those were awful days for Berna. Though she would not confess it to herself, a very demon of jealousy was rending her heart. She would not marry Gorman herself, but she could not bear that he should marry any one else. What she went through about that time she never told. Night after night she lay sobbing till the dawn. In the morning, and at noon, and till the evening, she tried to accomplish some allotted task ; but the work, or the book, or the pencil would drop from her tired fingers, and she would fall into weary reverie, from which sometimes even the sound of her mother's voice often failed to arouse her. At these times she thought but of Gorman, forgetting Mr. Muir ; then Mr. Muir would come in, and she could remember nothing save the fact that he was abhorrent to her, and that he called Gorman son.

It was a Sunday morning in early June when Mrs. Boyle called up to Berna to know if she meant to be all day dressing herself.

"I would rather not go to church, mamma," said that young lady ; "I am tired."

"Well, I don't know what it's with, then," answered the widow, who, having long previously judiciously curtailed her mourning, now appeared with something white and gauzy around her neck, giving a premonitory hint of what might further be expected in the way of change. "You're getting idler and idler ; it's my belief you'll be too lazy to live after a while, and that you'll die because you can't bear the trouble of keeping about. As for not coming with me to church, though, make no mistake ; I'm not going alone, and I am not going to stay away. I wonder if you never give the next world a thought, and you so obstinate and unfeeling in this. I'll be in my place, if only to show the people it's nothing to me what Mr. Gorman Muir chooses to do or leave undone."

Without answering a word, Berna turned into her own little

bedchamber, put on her mantle and bonnet, and then stood thoughtfully looking at her gloves.

Ruth was in the room, and suspended her employment to glance at the pale, weary face reflected in the glass. "Miss Berna dear, you're not fit to go. Let me try what I can do with the mistress, and—"

"It is of no use," interrupted the girl. Then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears. "O, I cannot, cannot bear much more!" she sobbed.

"Am I to be kept waiting all day?" cried Mrs. Boyle at this juncture.

"I am coming, mamma," answered Berna; and she went.

It was a perfect day; the grass was growing thick in the meadows; lambs were calling to their mothers; a mare with a colt by her side were looking over a gate; families were wending their way to meeting, dressed in their best clothes—the men, as became the lords of creation, walking in advance of their wives, daughters, and sisters, who, carrying Bibles wrapped in clean white handkerchiefs, kept a little behind, discoursing, as Mr. Muir would have said, "about such things as they could understand." Quite at their leisure, the Presbyterians "dandered" along. They had plenty of time, for their public worship did not begin till half an hour after the church bell stopped. Noon was an excellent time for persons forced to come from long distances to settle down in their pews; a far better time than that at which the sexton ceased reminding the by-law-established congregation they should be toiling up the hill.

"Make haste! we shall be all behind," said Mrs. Boyle, hurrying along with short, tripping steps. "I never saw such a girl! Not an atom of life or activity about you."

"Mamma, I cannot walk so fast," ventured Berna. "I really am not well."

"You'd be well enough if it wasn't for your sinful temper," answered Mrs. Boyle, pausing by the graveyard gate for her ghter, who panted painfully up the incline.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHORT as was the space which intervened between the gate of the graveyard and the church porch, Mrs. Boyle, while traversing it, contrived to smooth those feathers her "headstrong girl" had ruffled.

With mincing steps she pursued the path leading westward, preening herself like some conceited pigeon as she went, and adding such small touches to bows, net, crape, and cuffs as experience had taught her might advantageously be bestowed after a hurried walk and unavailing remonstrance with a young person "little better nor a natural."

"All abloom," the widow crossed the vestibule and sidled up the aisle, a complete contrast to Berna, who, so the few who were there to see afterwards averred, followed her mother "pale as death." Even the lily tints had faded out of her cheeks, leaving a deathlier white still.

One swift glance told Mrs. Boyle there was no man in the church worth setting her cap at. Mr. Garnsey was absent, Mr. Gorman Muir not present. The only churchwarden on view chanced to be married; while Mr. Crommles was a widower of such long standing that most women, young and old, tender blossoms and ancients of days, considered it a mere waste of time to encompass that clerical citadel.

"For all there's to see," considered the widow, "we might as well have stayed at home;" but before she had settled herself two strangers, lady and gentleman, were ushered into the rector's pew.

The lady wore the "neatest" bonnet, the widow thought, she ever beheld; while her mantle had a "French cut about it" that struck Mrs. Boyle as peculiarly fascinating, and

induced the reflection that if "Berna owned a bit of an eye for such things, she might have taken the pattern off in her head."

Indeed a lovely day! Through the open windows pleasant airs laden with sweet scents wandered into the church. Outside, the birds were singing and leaves dancing in the sunshine; a gentle wind stirred the grass growing above the quiet dead. There was a great silence, broken only by the voice of Mr. Crommles and the murmured responses of the congregation; even the clerk's sonorous "Amens" were more subdued than usual. Every now and then the whole scene seemed to fade away from Berna's sight, while the words of the rector sounded further and further away; portions of the service eluded her ear altogether; the singing sounded like a confused noise, heard as if coming from some remote distance. Over and over she tried to rouse herself, to shake herself into attention; but in a few minutes afterwards she found her mind again slipping away, utterly eluding her will. As in a dream, she listened to the Lessons; mechanically she stood, and knelt, and sat, till at last, just as Mr. Crommles was approaching the end of his sermon, every object seemed to reel round, and she had to clutch the front of the pew to save herself from falling.

"I shall faint if I do not go out," thought the girl; and rising, somehow she groped her way into the aisle, and blindly, but with the instinct of self-preservation strong upon her, managed to get into the open air and reach a square tomb, on which she sank, utterly exhausted.

"Good heavens! what is the matter, Miss Boyle?" exclaimed Gorman Muir.

Having come into church late, he had modestly taken a seat close by the door; and he was at Berna's side sooner than the sexton, who answered,

"She's not fit to tell you. Keep up her head while I go for a drop of water. Don't be scared; it's only a sort of a swoond. There, didn't I tell you?" he added, running back from the vestry. "You're better now, miss dear, aren't you?"

Take a sup of this. Don't try to hold the glass; I'll keep a grip of it. You're trembling like a leaf. When she's fit to move, you'd best help her round to my house. She can sit there a while; and I'll tell the mother not to be fretting herself. You're getting on bravely now, aren't you? Don't stir yet till you feel steady on your feet. That's right, Mr. Muir; she'll be best wanting her bonnet. Now I must go; Mr. Cronmles will be near done by this time. See, I'll just leave the tumbler beside you, case it's wanted again; and mind you take her round to the house; the people'll soon be passing here. Don't refuse his arm, maiss; you'll never be able to walk your lone. That's better. You're mighty tottery still. See the pride of her!" thought the sexton to himself, as he hurried back into the church. "She can't thole touching the man's coat-sleeve. Faith, and I don't blame her; though, if it comes to that, her own mother's no great things either."

As for Gorman, he paced by Berna's side in a very agony. What if his father's prophecy should prove true—what if the girl were to die!

Around lay those who had faded out of existence as young as she. Death did not spare, love could not save, them; why should death spare her? Why should his own love avail, when the tears of parents, the prayers of husbands, had in other cases failed to avert the doom? He pressed his right arm to his breast; he clenched his left hand in impotent despair; he lifted his eyes to the clear blue sky, and silently murmured a petition that she might live. He could not speak a word to her; his very heart seemed to stand still with dread. Thus among the graves and through the little rustic gate they moved in utter silence.

Not a human being was about; two large white goats—grazing on the little patch of common land in front of the few cottages, in one of which the sexton lived—turned and stared at them. Without ceremony, Gorman lifted the latch and opened the door.

The kitchen was empty. Beside a smouldering turf fire

stood an old-fashioned easy-chair. Gorman placed Berna in it, and then, leaning against the mantelshef, remained looking at the girl, who had sunk back in the seat and closed her eyes. After a minute she roused herself again.

"Do not let me keep you here," she said.

"Why are you so cruel to me?" he asked, with the quick revulsion of feeling common to untrained and passionate natures. "You would speak more kindly to a dog than you do to me, and yet what in the wide world is there I would not do for you? Why will you go on this way, breaking my heart? Why don't you give me a chance of winning your love? If I were the very worst and lowest of God's creatures you could not treat me more scornfully. Only tell me how I can please you—only set me some task, I do not care how hard—only treat me even as a brother, a friend—and—"

"I wish you would go," she murmured.

With an angry gesture he flung out of the cabin, and stood with his outward gaze wandering over the quiet landscape, though he really saw nothing but Berna. While they were crossing the graveyard he would have died for her. Now, in his fury, he felt as though he could have killed her. For the time being he was desperate. An ungovernable rage took possession of him, and a noise as of many waters was surging in his ears. He could not see sky or earth for a mist of tears. Many demons rent him so sore he could have cried aloud with pain; but at last they departed from out his soul, and he turned and reëntered the house.

"Shall I fetch your mother?" he asked; and his voice was hoarse by reason of the struggle in which he had been engaged.

"No, thank you," she answered wearily. "But if *you* would only go!"

"Don't be afraid; I'm going," he retorted, with difficulty restraining another paroxysm of rage. "I curse myself for having given you the chance of bidding me leave you twice. No woman ever before said to me 'Go!'—perhaps that is the reason I never cared to stop with any woman till I saw you!

O my God !” he added vehemently, “what I would not give to know how to melt the ice of your heart ! It does not matter to you, I suppose, that you are destroying everything that is good in me. I hate my life ; I hate myself ; I hate the very sunshine ! But there, what is the use of talking ? What I have to bear I must bear. It was a bad night’s work for me when I came upon you standing like a spectre in the shadows of that summer night. I would have been away from here, long enough ago, if it had not been for you. No ; don’t tell me to leave you again ; I am going. Upon my soul, I am ;” and then, throwing himself upon his knees beside her, he kissed Berna’s gloved hand over and over again. “My cruel love !” he cried. “My cruel, cruel love ! How can you be so cold to a man whose heart beats only for you ? No ; stay where you are,” he added, as the girl attempted to rise. “What a wretch I am, and you ill ! Forgive me !” and he left the cottage as Mrs. Boyle, all flutter and excitement, advanced towards it.

“Why, Mr. Gorman, who’d have dreamt of seeing you here ?” she exclaimed. “I thought you were in Donaghadee, no less. What’s wrong with Berna ?”

“I do not know, Mrs. Boyle,” answered the young man ; “she seems very ill.”

“There’s no end to my troubles,” exclaimed the widow ; “first one thing and then another. O, it is here you are, is it ?” she added, passing into the cabin, followed by Gorman. “A fine fright I’ve had over you. I’m sure, when I turned my head, wondering what the clerk and Mr. Crommles were staring at our pew for, and saw you were gone, a child might have knocked me down. I never was one to make a fuss for a disturbance, so I sat on till I could contain myself no longer, and then, after I’d been hunting all over the neighbourhood for you, the old man came out and told me you were here, resting yourself. Pity you hadn’t stopped at home if you didn’t feel well. How I’m to get you back there, goodness only knows.”

"Mrs. Miller has a car. She will lend it to me, I know," whispered Gorman eagerly.

"You're too kind altogether," said Mrs. Boyle. "I can never thank you enough for your goodness. What's that you're saying, Berna?—you'll walk! Indeed, and you'll do no such thing—at least, I know I'm not going to walk with you. I thought," turning with an engaging simper to Gorman, "we'd never get to church at all. She dragged along just like some rheumatic old woman. I'm sure I hope if ever I live long enough to get into years I'll be different from her. She hasn't a bit of life or activity. As Miss Sheill was only saying the last time I saw her, anybody might think I was the girl in my first teens, and Berna some staid grandmother."

"Miss Sheill was correct so far as you are concerned," remarked Gorman, anxious, even at the expense of truth, to make matters a little pleasanter. "Perhaps I had better be seeing about that car."

He did not remain away long. At the foot of the hill he met a lad, who gladly undertook to carry his message; while he, nothing loth, retraced the way he had so lately come.

Short as was the time, he saw Berna had been crying. "And she won't marry me, who would never speak an unkind word to her," he thought bitterly.

"Had you not better come out into the air, Mrs. Boyle?" he asked; "you seem to find it warm here;" and his glance sought Berna's face, in hopes that she might thank him with her eyes. But the girl would not look at him. He was resolute, however, to keep Mrs. Boyle away from her daughter. He showed her the goats, he walked with that lady up and down over the grass, he spoke of the prospect, he flattered and humoured her, and "kept the fun going" till at last his messenger returned to state,

"Mrs. Miller said he might have the car and welcome; and her son was yoking the horse."

CHAPTER XXX.

It was one evening towards the end of the same week ; Berna lay on a sofa in her own little room, a plaid shawl thrown over her feet, one thin white hand contrasting with the blackness of her mourning dress, her eyes closed, her mouth a little compressed, her forehead drawn into a pucker. Through the open window roses thrust in their heads, filling the room with perfume ; dimity curtains stirred gently as the light breeze swept past them ; swallows were darting hither and thither ; on a stool placed near the sofa Ruth sat darning stockings. Not a sound disturbed the stillness ; even the music of the little stream was hushed. The water was so low it scarcely murmured as it trickled slowly over the pebbles, and wound a languid course to the sea.

"Are you in any pain, my poor lamb?" asked Ruth at length, laying down her work and looking wistfully at the girl she loved so truly.

Berna opened her eyes, and, sighing heavily, answered,

"No, nurse ; only tired."

"Do you not think you feel any better?"

"I am not ill ; only tired."

"Do you know what the doctor asked your mother when he was here to-day?"

"No. What was it?"

"Whether you had anything on your mind."

"O !"

"And she asked, what would a girl of your age have on her mind?"

"Yes, and he—"

"Said that was nonsense ; that you were eighteen years of age ; that he could find no sign of disease about you ; and

that he felt morally certain you were fretting, or in trouble of some sort."

"What did mamma say?"

"The outcome of it all was she couldn't think of a mortal thing that ailed you, without it was having lost your father; and the doctor he asked how long he had been dead, and then he shook his head, and put it plain—were you in love?"

The brilliant colour of old dyed Berna's cheeks crimson for a moment; but the next faded away, leaving her pale as death. "Go on, nurse," she entreated.

"'Love, indeed!' says the mistress; 'time enough for all that this many's the day! No; it's just her oddity and contrariness. Love! my word, that is a fine notion! We'll have the babies in arms thinking about love next. You're wrong this time, doctor; while you were about it, I wonder you didn't make some likelier guess than that.'

'Maybe I'm wrong,' he said; 'but I don't think I am.'

'That's the very thing you are, though,' she made answer.

'Well, well,' returns the old man; 'well, well, well—'

"And that was all, nurse?"

"All, except that you're to have the best of good living, and change of some sort as soon as you get up your strength a bit; and O, my dear, dear child, won't you speak to your poor old nurse and tell her something of what's in your mind? Sure it's better to be living than dead, to be happy than proud. If you're fond of him—and I know you are—why won't you make some sign? Any one with a grain of sense could see he fairly worships the ground you walk on. It's not the match I wanted for you. It's a great come down, I know. Still, he has good people belonging to him on his mother's side, and his uncle gave him the best of education; and he has gentleman's ways with him, and there's many a thing against you marrying as you ought. Great ladies before now—ay, even grander ladies than Sir Herbert Boyle's wife; and, as you know, she's an earl's daughter—have chosen husbands scarce their equal by a long way, and lived content with them all

their lives—more content than if they'd been in king's palaces. It's not exactly a man or a woman's relations, Miss Berna, but the man or the woman's self; and so, if you have a fancy for Mr. Gorman Muir—and I know you had from the first—what would hinder you saying a pleasant word to him now and again? You needn't say much. Starving folk are thankful for crumbs, and if there was anybody starving for a kind look, it's young Mr. Muir."

"He is not likely to get kind looks or pleasant words from me," answered Berna, throwing up her right arm and resting her head upon it. "You are wrong, nurse. All I want is to be left in peace, to live my own life and face my own fate as I must face it. I need rest, and I can't get it while strangers are coming to the house. I want fresh air, and there is no place round all this neighbourhood I can be sure of not meeting him. It is that which has laid me up," went on the girl, raising herself on her elbow and looking with longing eyes beyond the roses and the shrubs to the calm evening glory which flooded the sky. "O, if you knew the quiet hand those long lonely walks used to seem to lay on my unquiet heart, you would understand. I am ill now just as a prisoner might be ill who even in his cell scarcely ever was so blessed as to be quite alone."

Ruth rose. She smoothed the pillows; she passed a gentle though hard hand across the broad white forehead. "Lie down, dear, lie down," she said; "I am only a poor ignorant woman; I never had much learning. I am not able to speak to you as I'd wish to speak, but I think I understand. Still, Miss Berna, maybe it might be well for you to consider. You can't go on as you are going for ever. You've no chance of visiting and seeing the world like other young ladies. You've shut the door between yourself and the master's grandmother. Who have you got to look to if you don't look after yourself? And here's a lover only waiting the smallest sign from you to give you a house of your own and a husband who would just dote upon you."

Berna laughed a little bitterly. "Was not there some one," she asked, "that said, 'Not a Boyle belonging to me but would turn in their graves,' if I took up with Gorman Muir? 'That he was not a gentleman, that he was a worse man than his father,' and a great many more things of the same sort? If you have changed your ideas, I have not, Ruth."

"But I didn't know anything about him then, miss. It was nothing but the common talk I repeated, and I don't suppose anybody was much better acquainted with him than myself. I have never met any young man civiler spoken or better behaved; and I hear he's making a lot of money, and is free with it as free can be. And he's kind, I'm sure. He was riding along the road the other day in front of me, and there was a poor old grandmother carrying a child and a heavy basket. The creature looked fit to drop. Mr. Gorman pulls up. 'Which shall I take?' he says, as pleasant as you please. 'I can't manage both basket and child, but hand me up which you like.' Your own father, dear, couldn't have spoken kinder, or put his arm more natural-like round the boy."

"I never said he was not kind, Ruth; he may be, for all I know, though he is Mr. Muir's son."

"Well, miss, a child mostly can't choose its parents."

"That is very true; but at least I can choose not to have Mr. Muir for a father-in-law. I would not marry into that family—no, not if the son had fifty thousand a year."

"If that's so," said Ruth, smoothing a stocking on her lap, "it's a pity he does not speak and be done with it."

"Do you suppose he has not spoken, then?" said the girl, again raising herself.

"I didn't know. Has he ever—"

"Over and over again, Ruth. And I am so tired of it all, of saying 'No, no, no—no.' He won't take 'No.' I can't go across the threshold without meeting him. I should be well enough if he would only let me alone—if he would believe what I tell him. I must do something, nurse; but I do not know how to do it. If I could get away—some place ever so

far away, where I should never see or hear of him again, you cannot imagine what a comfort it would be."

"And your eyes are full of tears as you say that. O child dear, consider whether you are not making a mistake. There's Miss Garnsey, now, would marry him to-morrow; and they do say Mr. Garnsey's on for the match himself; and why couldn't you give him a chance to see if it was just possible you might change your notion? Pride's very well, but it is cold comfort for an aching heart. In my poor way I was proud once myself; and I know I have lain from night to morning crying for the smile I'd once turned away from. I never told you, Miss Berna, about Pat Harrigan. If we're very fond of anybody, it comes hard to talk about them; but I feel, this evening, as if I wouldn't mind so much telling you why I never married—never cared to look at any man, except the one—"

"Tell me, nurse," said Berna softly.

Ruth paused a moment before she began, and there came across her furrowed face and her homely features a light, as if from some far distance the sunshine of youth was shining full upon one no longer young or comely. "It was at Carrick May fair I first saw him. My father was set against my going, but he gave way at last, and me and my cousin Rose started together. Pat came up to us when we were buying gingerbread-nuts at one of the stalls. I can see him now. He was straight as a dart, and his face was brown with being out in the weather, and he had soft kind eyes; and he singled us girls out. He followed us wherever we went; and when we started to walk home again, nothing would serve him but that he must put us a piece of the road. He walked on and on, till at last I made him turn, saying my father would be angry; and then Rose and I made haste home, laughing and talking as we went, she saying the young man was after me, and I saying it was her he was after; but I knew better all the time. All that summer he was, on and off, over at Ballynure, where we had a bit of a farm. We were comfortably off; my father worked as a day labourer, and my mother and the rest of us wrought

about the land ; and we held our heads a trifle high because we owed nobody anything, and had a few pounds in an old worsted stocking hidden away under the thatch.

"Maybe that was the reason I wouldn't have anything to say to Pat, though I knew I liked him well. He couldn't get a kind look from me, and I used to say hard things till my father got cross, and my mother said, 'I don't know what you want, girl. There's only one thing against him, and that's his religion.' 'And that he has the old woman to keep, and little to keep her with,' I'd make answer. And then my mother would get more vexed still, because she didn't like me to seem to be grudging the poor widow her bite and sup—and Pat was the last she had brought up respected and respectable. He was only a fisherman, Pat ; and he couldn't earn much—what with the nets getting torn, and there being so many to share what profits were made. Sometimes when we met I'd scarce speak to him ; when he was away I thought I'd give the world to have him near ; when he was at hand I tormented him ; and yet, Miss Berna, all the time I knew well I cared for nobody else—that I liked his little finger better than any other man's whole body. We had a quarrel once, and my heart felt breaking. He kept away for a month, and then it all began over again. I said he'd best stop away—that I didn't want him—that I'd never marry a Catholic or live with any man's mother. I was a hard wretch. I think I see the strained, sorrowful face with which he turned away without a word. He had not got many perches from the door before he came back : 'I can't desert my mother for you, Ruth ; and I won't give up my religion ; but there's nothing a man may do for a woman I wouldn't try to do for you, my foolish young love.'"

"Ah ! my poor Ruth," murmured Berna ; and there was a moment's silence in the room.

"We had just got in our harvest, when one day a cart stopped at the end of the loanin', and a woman came up to the house. It was his mother. I had never seen her before. She was worn and wasted and had seen a lot of trouble, and

the gentle face of her, and something like tears in her voice, cut me to the heart. She said she wanted so bad to see me, and she had got a friend to give her a sail over in his cart—that is the way they talk there, with always living beside the sea. She couldn't bear to see her son fretting as he was, and she talked to me and my mother and my father, and she kissed me when she went away, and hoped I'd make Pat a good wife some day. 'For he's better than rich : he's dutiful and brave, and he loves you as men don't often love.' And so I sent him a word of comfort, but I wouldn't say much, and I used to go down sometimes to see her when I knew he was away. I don't know what made me like that, for I wasn't stiff or nasty to anybody but the man who was beyond all men to me—"

"Nurse, it hurts you to talk ; don't tell me any more."

"There's not much more to tell, dear ; but it is enough. It was a rough winter. It was a very bad winter for the poor fishermen, and many a time when the wind has been shrieking and swirling round the house, I have lain and shivered, wondering if Pat was down about the Gobbins, and thinking about the three hundred fathoms of wild dark water rushing against the rocks that rise so sheer down there.

"There came one very bad night ; the storm seemed to take our house in its hand, intending to dash it to pieces—a perfect tempest roared across the lonely open country lying up on the top of the hills. For hours I could get no sleep ; I trembled till the bed shook under me, and I vowed I'd never speak unkind to Pat again. At last I dropped off, and then I awoke sudden with the sound of some one speaking in my ear. I saw Pat, miss, I saw him plain. All the room was pitch dark, save one corner that had a strange sort of light, such as I never saw on earth. It was not of the sun or the moon or the stars, and from out of that Pat was looking at me mournfully. 'Good-bye, Ruth ; good-bye,' he said ; and the voice grew fainter and fainter, and he faded and faded away, and there was darkness all around me, and I lay shaking with the fright.

“The next morning, at the first streak of day, I started, without my breakfast, and walked on till I got to Carrick. I spoke to nobody as I went through the town, and nobody spoke to me: at last I got to the house where his mother lived. The door was shut, but I pulled the string and opened the latch and went in. She was sitting with some of the neighbours round her, and most of them were crying. *Then I knew.* I couldn’t ask a question, but after a while I heard that some vessel was in distress, and not a man would go to her. They thought it was certain death, and they had their wives and their families. Then an old gentleman, whose son was on board, came among them, and, with his white hair streaming and the tears running down his face, offered them money if they would at least try to launch a boat. My Pat was there. He was standing on the White Quay, with the waves sweeping over it. ‘I’ll not sell my life,’ he said, ‘but I’ll give it,’ and he jumped into the boat, and some others followed him, and they did save the crew. But when the boat came back it was without Pat. All was over, the world had ended for me! His mother and me were sitting together, talking low, when some one opened the door softly, and, looking at us, lifted his hand and said ‘Hush!’ Then we knew they had got him, got all that would ever come home again of my handsome, tender lover. They laid him on the bed: there was a sort of wistful smile on his lips, and through the half-closed lids I could see the colour of the eyes that might never again look at me. I think that’s all, Miss Berna.”

The girl’s thin hand sought that of the woman, there was not a word more spoken, but they stayed there utterly still, while the evening glory departed, and the mystical twilight crept on.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“DEAR MRS. VINCE,—Though *Mister* Vince, as people call him now he’s got up so high in the world, wouldn’t care if he saw his own lying dead in the street, I think, after all the fuss you drove with Berna—making her out a nonsuch, and setting her against her own mother—you’ll feel sorry for your neglect when you hear the doctor says the girl is as bad as bad can be. She’s to be kept up—I’m only telling you his very words—and live on the fat of the land, and have change, and good society, and red wine, and calf’s-foot jelly; and where one of these things is to be got out of my income, perhaps you know—I’m sure I don’t. If it was myself, I’d fade away like a leaf before one of you should be troubled; but in case anything happened to Berna, I’d never hear the last of it. So now I’ve told you just what’s going on, you can please yourself; only, never blame me afterwards for keeping you in the dark. It’s true enough that some of us are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards; I’ve had my share, anyhow. I don’t know what you would best like me to say I am; so I’ll conclude with only my name,

MILLY BOYLE.”

Mrs. Vince happened to be alone when this letter was handed to her. She read it twice through, and after audibly remarking, “Then she can write; I always fancied she was unable to do so,” applied a match to the paper, and let it smoulder away to the last inch.

“She must be an idiot,” considered the wife of Richard Charles Vince, Esq., contemplating the blackened remains of Mrs. Boyle’s extraordinary epistle. “No woman in her senses would run the chance of having all help withdrawn. She little

knows the trouble I have had to induce my husband to continue the income he does allow her. I will drive over and see what underlies this ridiculous rambling effusion. If the poor girl is ill, of course she must be seen to."

It was in accordance with this decision that when, "after having had no more dinner than would content a fly," Mrs. Boyle was wandering about the garden, protecting her "clear complexion" from injury by means of a parasol, and speculating what could have become of Gorman, and whether he would call that day, she "suddenly lifted her eyes" and beheld a carriage at the gate.

"I thought that would fetch her," she muttered, with a triumphant little gasp. "Your husband," she mentally added, "is not the only clever one of the Vince family, my lady! This *is* a surprise!" she said aloud, advancing to meet Richard's wife. "I never expected to see you at Clear Stream again. Why, it must be near upon a year since you were out before. But there, to be sure, of course you are always visiting, and haven't leisure to be thinking whether your poor relations are living or dead."

"How is your daughter?" asked Mrs. Vince, determinedly cutting across this tirade.

"About the same; if anything, worse."

"What is the matter with her?"

"Goodness only knows—I don't. It's a sort of perishing from the root. She never had much heart or spirit; but she was wild, just out of her mind with tricks and diversions when you saw her, in comparison to what she is now. My life is fairly fretted out of me—as if there wasn't trouble and expense enough before, without her taking it into her head to get ill! If ever a woman was born unlucky, that woman's me—not a farthing's-worth of satisfaction with husband or child, or husband's friends, or my own."

"Let us go into the house," suggested Mrs. Vince. "I have a few words I wish to say to you quietly."

"Well, well, you can be quiet as you like. If it wasn't for

a neighbour sometimes looks in to pass the time of day, we might as well be in the graveyard. Quiet ! If that's what you want, you could not have come to a better place. But aren't you going to take a look at Berna ?"

"Presently—not just yet;" and Mrs. Vince shut the sitting-room door, and, without being invited, took a seat.

"I wish to have an understanding with you, Mrs. Boyle," she said.

"There oughtn't to be any hardship about that," answered the widow bravely, though Mrs. Vince's manner made her uncomfortable. "There never was anybody easier understood than myself."

"Then I had better come to the point at once. Are you not afraid of goading my husband into cutting himself adrift from you altogether?"

"He can do about that as he likes. There is not a creature knows him but is aware it's shame, instead of justice, makes him give me the pittance he does."

"May I ask what you mean by justice? Is Mr. Vince bound, either in law or in honour, to allow you one shilling?"

"He wouldn't pay a single sixpence, if he could help it."

"You will find, I think, he very soon will help it, if you continue to talk about him as you do. He hears in all directions that you say he is cruel and stingy."

"So he is."

"That he has no feeling for you or your daughter."

"Neither he has."

"That he owes his fortune entirely to your father."

"Well, and doesn't he?"

"That while he was glad enough to go to Boyle Court when you were rich, he turns his back upon you now you are poor."

"I suppose you are not going to say he has ever set foot across this threshold since he drove me into banishment, away from all my friends. O dear ! Esau's not the only one sold his birthright for a mess of pottage."

"You had better, then, take back your birthright. Do what you like, say what you like, live where you like—only without help from him. It is absurd to suppose he will continue to pay you the money he does, if you go round the country vilifying a man who has acted most generously by you."

"As all are aware, I'm poor enough, and I'm lonely enough; so you are at liberty to say what you like to me."

"I have no wish to be hard upon you," answered Mrs. Vince, recovering from her sudden gust of passion. "My husband is in London at present, and on his return I shall say nothing about your letter; I would not vex him by the mention of such ingratitude; and for your daughter's sake I am willing to give you another chance. I tell you fairly, however, that I am almost weary of standing between you and the consequences of your own folly; and should I hear again that you have spoken of my husband in the same terms as hitherto, I shall leave him to act towards you as he may think best."

"I am sure *I* have said nothing; but you can't stop people's tongues."

"Perhaps not; but we can stop paying your rent and forty pounds a year."

"It's scarce becoming of you, Mrs. Vince, who owe the very dress you've on your back to my family, to talk to me as you are doing."

"Good heavens! this woman is enough to drive any one mad!" exclaimed Mrs. Vince.

"There was not much madness about you," retorted Mrs. Boyle, "when you went to Richard Vince to ask him to take you as housekeeper."

"*When I what?*"

"I am sure I spoke plain enough: when you went and said, didn't he think you'd make him a first-rate housekeeper?"

"Mrs. Boyle, you cannot really be in your senses."

"A while ago it was you was going out of your mind. Right or wrong, that's the story going about the world."

"It is an absolute falsehood."

"Well, well, you ought to know best. At any rate, it is in everybody's mouth, and nobody's likely to believe to the contrary now. It is an old saying, that 'a lie travels round the world while truth is putting on his boots;' and you'll have a good deal of trouble convincing the world you think so much of that you didn't make a lucky bid for my cousin. Maybe you might have done just as well to have made a friend of me. My word would have gone a long way; for even strangers always said, 'If there's one in the North you can depend on, that one is Milly Vince.' However, we'll see. You're mighty well up in life now; but 'it's a high tree has no top;' and little as you account me at this minute, maybe the day'll come when you will wish you had thought Mrs. Boyle worth a civil word."

"When was I otherwise than civil to you?"

"O, that's all very fine! As I was saying to a person only a few days back—"

"I do not wish to hear what you said to any one."

"Ah! perhaps you'll be of a different opinion when you see me as grand as yourself, with a fine handsome man for a husband, who won't sit still and know his wife put upon."

Mrs. Vince's heart leapt for joy.

"No human being, Mrs. Boyle," she said, "will be more rejoiced to see you married again than myself."

"I'm glad to hear it. You won't have long to wait for that gratification."

"And what will become of your daughter?"

"She'll always be welcome to share of whatever home I have; and it's only she prevents me having one to-morrow. She's that contrary it makes a man half afraid to come to the house. Of course, he thinks to himself, if a girl's so unpleasant to him before marriage, what will she be after?"

"A most natural reflection. And so Berna does not take kindly to the idea of your second union?"

"Kindly! You should have seen the look on her face the first day I put a scrap of white round my throat; and it's cruel

to expect a woman, still young like myself, especially with such a complexion and figure, to stop in weeds till all my chances are over! And she has a way of sitting when we are all laughing and making merry, without speaking a word or even encouraging us by a smile."

"That must be very trying."

"You see, her father was all the world to her. Neither of them ever thought about *me*. I am sure, my very heart seems full to breaking when I think of the way I was treated among them all. And she never considers what would have become of her if I hadn't thrown myself away on Ulick Boyle. When I am sitting alone, I often wonder Berna's conscience does not smite her—if she ever considers her ingratitude to the best of mothers."

"Certainly my husband's cousin is a lunatic," decided Mrs. Vince; but she only said,

"Perhaps, then, if I could persuade your daughter to come to me for a little while, it might make matters easier for you both."

"You'd not get her to go. You can try, but you'll see. Many a one has striven to seduce my girl away from me, but they have all failed. She knows who is her best friend. There was the Dowager, for example, would have clothed her in purple and fine linen, and offered her sumptuous fare every day the sun rose—five meals a day, too—and wild horses couldn't drag her to the old woman."

"But, perhaps, as she is so ill—"

"You can try. She is welcome to go, for me. I never was one to consider myself, and I am just as content and happy alone as if I was among thousands. My father always said, 'Milly's the happy chick of the family. Set her down where you will, she'll pick a grain of content.' I take after him in that. When he had finished his second tumbler of punch he was the life and soul of the company. Ah! there's few like him—the cheerful ways he had with him! You wouldn't think Richard Vince was a drop's blood to one of us."

"The gentleman you are thinking of marrying resides in this neighbourhood?" suggested Mrs. Vince.

"Well, he does, and he doesn't, if you can understand what I mean. It's like the old riddle my father used to puzzle us children with. Till it was explained, people used to consider it a wonderful mystery. I suppose you never heard this; it'll do to make sport among your own young ones: 'There's a man in New Row, and he's Nott in New Row. He's Nott alive, and he's not dead. But he lives in New Row, and he sells thread.'"

"Crazier than any poor demented witch," thought Mrs. Vince.

"Well, as I was saying," proceeded Mrs. Boyle, "he didn't happen to be reared in these parts; but he was born here, and has friends here among the first in the land. You've heard, perhaps, of Mr. Garnsey, of Beechfield. He's hand and glove with him, and he keeps his hunters, and goes out with the harriers and stag-hounds, and he'll bring no disgrace upon Richard Charles Vince or yourself, big people as you think yourselves."

"The chief consideration, Mrs. Boyle, is, will he make you happy?"

"Happy! why, he's the best of good company; he can sing, and play, and dance. Wait till you see him, and you'll count me the lucky woman to have taken his fancy."

"I congratulate you most cordially."

"Yes, I thought you'd be pleased. That's one thing I will say concerning those that come of good family, there's no grudging about them; you've done well yourself, Mrs. Vince, but you wouldn't mind anybody else should do well too. I am glad I told you: it's off my mind, and when Richard comes back you can give him a hint how the land lies."

"That I certainly will. And now may I see your daughter?"

"And welcome! She's fit enough to leave her room; but she won't come in here for fear of meeting those she thinks

herself above, though they're as good as any Boyle ever was. Maybe you could bring her to her senses. Just put it to her how low we've come down in the world, and how a match such as I have in view would be the making of us all. Go in alone ; I'd best stay out. She thinks a heap of you. Berna, here's a friend come to see you ;" and Mrs. Boyle, after making this announcement, shut the door of her daughter's room, across which Mrs. Vince walked with both hands extended.

"My poor, poor child !" she cried ; "what is the matter with you ? and who did you think the friend was ? Don't tremble so, dear !" and she drew the girl's head down upon her bosom, and sat silent for a moment. Then, "I want to take you back with me to Craigvallen, my love," she went on ; "your mother has given her consent, and I mean to nurse you myself. I know now why you wrote and asked me to stop away ; but you were foolish, Berna, very foolish ; don't be foolish again. Say you are willing to come with me."

"Willing !" repeated Berna. "*Thankful !* O Mrs. Vince—"

"Not another word," interrupted that lady. "I am going to call Ruth. The carriage is waiting. You can talk as much or as little as you please at Craigvallen. All I want is to get you there."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MUCH perplexed in mind, Mr. Muir walked down the long avenue leading to Craigvallen House.

He had seen many fine places before ; but never previously one so well kept, or which bore so unmistakably the visible signs and tokens of wealth. The grass was like velvet ; the drive free from moss and weeds ; the shrubs were of the rarest ; even the trees seemed well cared for.

"There is no standing still for money here," thought the farmer. "I begin to misdoubt me it's a bad business altogether." And he shook his head sorrowfully as he looked around.

Berna had been absent from Clear Stream for more than a fortnight, and during the course of that time a terrible light had broken on Mr. Muir. One day when he was up at Sunnyside looking at a recent purchase of Gorman's, Miss Garnsey, accompanied by no less than three dogs, turned in, ostensibly to see an animal whose praises young Muir had been chanting to her father.

"She's come on the chance of finding Gorman," decided the farmer ; and he kept the lady sauntering about Sunnyside and Ardilaw for some time in hopes his son might return. But Gorman did not return. Of late he had been restless and unsettled ; given, so said Peter Doey, to taking "queer notions," absenting himself for days together without "rhyme or reason," attending to his business only by fits and starts, and in many other ways throwing out bad feathers, and indicating the possibility of ere long going headlong to perdition.

It was the wild drop revealing itself, Mr. Muir decided. He had often meant to speak to Gorman on the subject ; but Gorman was not a person to whom it always seemed easy to

talk, and thus, so far, no explanation had been arrived at between the father and son.

"He is frequently from home now," said Miss Garnsey, as she stood just where the Ensign once stood, picking currants from the very same bush the farmer had found him regarding with such rapt attention.

"He has a heap on his mind," answered Mr. Muir deprecatingly. "Dealing in horses is a business which needs a power of attention."

"So it seems," agreed the lady, with a laugh, the tone of which Mr. Muir did not quite like, accustomed though he was to Miss Garnsey's many pleasant ways.

"The worst of it is, he can scarce call his time his own," said the farmer.

"Then he has the less leisure for getting into mischief."

"There are few steadier young men going than Gorman, Miss Garnsey."

"I don't suppose you know much about what he is."

"I think I may allow myself to be a judge on that point; there's not one bit of harm in the lad. I have no manner of fault to find with him, unless it is his restlessness. It's rare for him to be in the same mind now two days together," went on Mr. Muir tentatively. "I did hope he was settling down and getting quite content."

"Did you?"

"But I don't suppose any man can be expected to do well till he has a wife of his own to work for. I would be real glad to see him happy with a fine young wife."

"Perhaps it won't be long before you do."

"Well, I have had a notion once or twice there was some thought of the kind."

"So have I."

"You don't think I am altogether wrong, then?"

"No; I am sure you are not."

"And it's not beyond possibility I could give a guess at her name."

"I could."

"And maybe you wouldn't mind mentioning it to me—in a whisper, you know," said Mr. Muir, with a smile he considered irresistible.

"There is no necessity to whisper about the matter, so far as I am aware. The young lady's name is—"

"Yes, miss, yes; you've no call to be shy with *me*."

"I am not at all shy with anybody, only perhaps you might like to defer the evil hour a little longer. Upon the whole, I doubt whether it is a match you will much care for."

"Now, you know there is nothing would pleasure me more."

"I should not have supposed that exactly."

"Ah, that is only your fun."

"Yes; it is only my fun. And so you really wish to know the lady's name?"

"I'd like well to hear it from your own lips. But perhaps I'm asking too much."

"Not at all. What do you say to—Boyle?" and Miss Garnsey's eyes sparkled with mischievous enjoyment.

"I deemed from the first you were joking."

"Joking! Where is the joke?"

"You don't think Gorman would look at a withered-up old woman like that, even if she was in her senses, which she is not, and had ten times the money she wants?"

"No; I am not talking of the mother, but the daughter;" and the merriment died out of Miss Garnsey's eyes, and her face grew hard and defiant by reason of the jealous pain she was enduring.

"The daughter!" and Mr. Muir stopped in the middle of the garden-path as if turned to stone.

"Do you mean to say the idea never occurred to you?" inquired Miss Garnsey.

"Never—never once. What would have made it occur to me?"

"Why, he is always at the cottage."

"Is that so?"

"That is so; and of course we both guess it is neither the widow nor the servant who constitutes the attraction."

"You have dealt me a heavy blow this day, Miss Garnsey. Still, I would fain hope you are not altogether right in your conjecture."

"I think you will find I am. Ask your son."

"I am not so sure he might make me a very civil answer."

"Having opened your eyes, Mr. Muir, I may as well go home now."

"You leave a very troubled man behind you."

"O, you will get reconciled ere long. There is no reason why it should matter much to *you*."

"It matters everything to me. I wouldn't for five hundred pounds—no, not for a thousand—such a misfortune had come to pass. But he'll get over it, he must get over it; there's no sense in the affair. To think of throwing himself away in this manner!"

"He knows his own value best," retorted Miss Garnsey. "Come, Bruce; hi! there, Jack. Good-bye, Mr. Muir; give my best wishes to the happy couple."

"I'm d—d if I will!" thought Mr. Muir; but he made no audible answer, while he strode gloomily by Miss Garnsey's side to the gate. Then, after he had watched her and the dogs down the hill, he paced along the back avenue till he came to the stump of an old tree, on which he seated himself to digest his chagrin.

There Doey, on his way to the yard for a bridle, saw "the old man," and wondered what he was doing, "sitting a'most in the cart track." Mr. Muir did not speak when he passed by the first time, but as he returned said somewhat hoarsely,

"Peter!"

"Well, what do you want with Peter?"

"Wait a minute and I will tell you."

Mr. Doey, being good enough to comply, paused and listened for what might follow.

"Peter," began Mr. Muir, "you're an observant character, and you take notice of many a thing few might give you credit for, so I'm just going to put a plain question to you."

"What is it?"

"You have seen more of my son for a good while now than I have, and been about with him here and there."

"Well?"

"Did it ever come into your head he had a notion of anybody?"

"Is that all? In course it did."

"And could you give a guess who she is?"

"I could give a guess who she isn't; though, upon my faith, I believe she might have had him any day almost this last six months, if she'd been wiser and known how to catch him when the other wouldn't so much as look at him."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Miss Garnsey. He'd have married her for spite, over and over again."

"Whom did he want to spite?"

"O Mr. Muir, you've never been so blind as all that comes to, and you a knowledgeable man into the bargain? I wouldn't have credited it; and the thing going on under your very nose!"

"Can't you speak out, and tell me who it is you mean?"

"Well, this beats all! Who is it? Who would it be but Miss Boyle? If ever a young man was in desperation about a girl, that young man is Gorman Muir. It's all along of her he's neglecting his business, and going as fast as he knows how to Old Nick. It's a sore pity, too; for there's a mine of money in Sunnyside, if he'd give his mind to working it. Faith, women are at the bottom of every bother in the world! Trouble began with Eve, and some Eve has been busy making more ever since. I wish there wasn't a woman on earth. If I hadn't worn and spent myself keeping things together, it's beyond me to conceive what would have become of us all long ago."

Mr. Muir rose, and, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, said,

"And all the time, like a fool, I was thinking he had at last settled his mind to make up to Miss Garnsey."

"He might have her, and a fine fortune too, for the asking," answered Peter; "and he'll never get the other one."

"Why wouldn't he get the other one? What would hinder him getting her?"

"Because she won't have him; that's why, Mr. Muir. How do I know that? Never mind; I do know it. Couldn't I see your face if it was reflected in a glass? and can't I see the way she's treating him by looking at your son's doings? He never did take to drink and wickedness and idleness as long as he'd a hope she'd take him; but she won't. She thinks herself far and away too good for that."

"Too good for him!" repeated the farmer, in hot wrath. "Do you dare to tell me that widow woman's daughter wouldn't be only too keen to jump at such a chance and it were offered to her?"

"As for daring, Mr. Muir," retorted Peter, "I'm not afraid of you nor any other man, and I dare say just what I please. If you hadn't been so set upon your own plan, you'd have known what I know—that your son thinks the sun rises and sets for that girl, and that she has made up her mind to have no say whatever to him. I don't mean she doesn't like him. She can't be off liking him. Where's the woman wouldn't? But the pride of her has eaten all the love up."

"What's she got to be proud of? That's what I want to know," said Mr. Muir. "Is it her cracked old mother, or her grandfather, Sam Vince—a low dirty attorney, no decent man ever went to twice? Then we all know what Richard Vince sprang from—"

"That makes no sort of odds," interrupted Doey, with irritating calmness. "What does it signify where the man sprang from, when we see what he has sprung into? He is as rich as he can be; he has a grand place; there is no

house shut against him ; he has married among the best of the land ; his wife drives a pair of horses no nobleman in the county could beat ; and when you've said all you can say about him, I am given to understand the Boyles are greater quality still. They are made welcome at the Court of the Queen itself ; and as for the Lord-Lieutenant, he's hand and glove with Sir Herbert and his wife. They never go through Dublin without dropping in at The Castle to pass the time of day, and take a friendly cup of tea."

"And what about the Gormans of Clonmellin?" asked Mr. Muir.

"I have nothing to say against them, I'm sure ; only you must mind this about Miss Boyle—if she'd have given up her mother she might have been blazing with diamonds and going about with feathers in her head ; and maybe she can't forget all that. Anyway, I'm feared your son has a poor chance, and I'm sorry for it ; for you'll see he'll never content himself here now."

To which pleasing remark Mr. Muir deigned no reply.

"Bad luck to him!" thought Doey as he climbed the hill. "After all the insight I gave, he had never the manners to say, 'Have you a mouth on you, Peter?' Well, well ; I think he has got a nut to crack will try his teeth. There'll be a fine to-do between the pair when Gorman comes back again. I only hope it won't end in the young one giving us all the cut go-by."

Days passed, and still Gorman did not return. He wrote from Dublin, and the letter contained some vague hint, which Mr. Muir construed to mean it was possible his son might leave Ireland altogether. Then the iron entered into the farmer's soul.

"How'll I ever live without him?" he thought. "Why did he come back, if I'm to lose him now? He sha'n't go ; no, if she's all he wants to be content, he must have her."

For twenty-four long hours he turned the matter wearily over in his mind ; then he came to a decision he could do

nothing unless Gorman confided in him fully and entirely. So far everything was mere conjecture. He did not know what had passed between the pair—"where the hitch had come."

"I have noticed for a while past," he wrote, "something has been wrong with you. Come back, and if it's in the power of man to help you, I'll do it."

"And meantime," he thought, after he had dropped his letter in the box, "I'll just step over to Craigvallen and ask how she is. That can't do any harm. I'll not go in, no matter how much they press me."

Mr. Muir's resolution was subjected to no such temptation. He saw only a stately butler, who said he "believed Miss Boyle was better. She had gone to Greenisland, with Mrs. Vince, for the benefit of sea-bathing."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“You are very good ; but it is all of no use. I have said everything man could say, and yet she is adamant.”

It was Gorman Muir who spoke, striding up and down the room he had furnished with some vague idea of proving even to himself he was not beyond the pale of civilised life. He never looked handsomer : his dark hair tossed back, his brown eyes flashing with a troubled light, his expression at once scornful and sorrowful, his head erect as though he were remonstrating against some terrible injustice—his whole attitude passionate, defiant, indignant. “If she could see him now !” thought his father, who sat quite still—his face pale, his lips compressed, his features set—a type of the not less intense and impulsive, but far more dangerous, side of Irish character.

The one man might have been swayed by argument or feeling ; not so the other. The germ of everything which has made the glory of her children—all the traits that have filled to overflowing the sad cup of Ireland’s shame—were, unknown to himself, planted deep in the nature of Hewson Muir. He was made precisely of the same stuff as the men who, through starvation and death, held Derry till relief came ; who, though their daily wage might have been counted by pence, refused “blood-money,” even when the temptation came in the shape of a thousand pounds ; who fought against “their natural enemies” at Fontenoy—fought for and with them on many a day since ; done deeds bards might immortalise, and committed crimes angels have wept to see.

He was made of the sternest and the most enduring stuff that can enter into the composition of a human being. Nevertheless, he could but be regarded as full of contradictions.

Hospitable yet mean, implacable yet generous, loyal yet rebellious, appreciative yet envious, cautious yet foolhardy, his temperament differed utterly from the poetic, passion-ridden, easily tempted, weakly-strong nature of the man who called him father. Save a tendency to fall, there was no trace of likeness between them. Mr. Muir possessed one quality in common with the Devil. He might have been great in sin, but he could scarcely have scaled any height of virtue. In the way of crime, Gorman could, given occasion, have trod step for step with his father to a certain point. There he would have stopped, and, by remorse and self-abnegation, tried, unavailingly it might be, but still tried, to atone for his fault.

To the father repentance was an unknown quantity; to the son it proved a wind which always seemed beating him back from some point he wanted to make. The one was an enemy to fear, the other a friend to doubt. Hewson Muir had none of the storm-driven nature which made Gorman's life now all sunshine, again all shade; but he possessed an intense power of concentration and resistance to external influences, that rendered the coast of his mind wilder and more treacherous than that whereon the waves of anger and sorrow dashed, exhausting their energies for evil in showers of blinding spray.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Muir, and the repression in his hard, cold voice formed a striking contrast to the tender softness and melting tone which rendered his son's lightest utterance almost a declaration of love. "You're talking a pack of rubbish. Here's a girl—I don't say she's bad looking: she is far from that, but she's nothing to make a song about—without a penny piece to her fortune, cast adrift by her father's relations, made none too welcome by her mother's side of the house, and you tell me she won't listen to reason—that she'd rather be a governess than marry you. The idea is totally beyond the bounds of sense. You've been too eager, my lad. You've let her see her power; she's trying you. As long as you follow, she'll run. Just you stop, put your hands in your

pockets, and shout 'Good-bye! I'm tired of this,' and she'll come to you fast enough."

"You are quite wrong about the matter," returned Gorman vehemently. "Did not I tell her I would make a fool of myself no longer? And I might just as well have spoken to a stone."

"Because you were not in earnest, and she knew it. She knew you couldn't leave her, and that you did not mean to leave her."

"But I did, I swear to you, If there ever were anything I intended more fully than another, it was either to go to ruin faster than I have yet tried to do, or marry a woman I dislike out of hand."

"I wish to the Lord you had done the last," interpolated Mr. Muir.

"I shall never do that now. Had I been able to bring myself to the state of mind in which a man marries a woman who is distasteful to him in every respect, except so far as utter honesty is concerned, your desire would have been fulfilled long since. As matters stand, what I shall do one day is this: I will go away, and never return. Had it not been for your kindness, father, during the months gone by, I should have gone ere this." And Gorman, acting upon an impulse he was unable to check, stretched out his hand, which Mr. Muir took and held for a moment in an eloquent silence ere he answered,

"Before you are driven to that, we'll make a try if we can't get for you what you've set your mind on. The girl wouldn't be my fancy, but if she's yours there's no call to talk more about the matter; you are putting as fine a chance as any man ever got behind your back, and you want to marry a beggar who is daughter to the craziest old woman in Ulster."

"Yes, and if she were willing to marry me, I should not object to fifty mothers-in-law each crazier than Mrs. Boyle."

"That's all very well till you've got your wife," answered Mr. Muir; "likely enough, after that, you'd think one too many."

"Would to Heaven I were tried!"

"Well, well, I've had my say; only, Gorman, I'd have you bear one thing in mind: when a woman has money, if you get tired of her there's satisfaction to be had out of her money, though there's none out of herself; and—"

"Look here," thundered Gorman, and he brought his clenched fist down on the table as he spoke, "if Berna Boyle were pitted with the smallpox, if she were stricken blind, if she were deaf, dumb, lame, a beggar in the street, she would still be Berna to me, *the* woman of my life, the love of my soul, the only sweetheart I have ever really had."

"God only knows what you see about her," said Mr. Muir. "When I was young I wasn't, perhaps, over particular; but I always did like a girl with some sort of warmth; a girl who, if she was fond of you, would throw her arms round your neck and kiss you, or let you draw her blushing face close to your own till—"

Gorman stamped his foot. "I know the girls you mean," he said, "and, I have no doubt, to some men they might seem charming; but I would wait a year for my mistress' smile, and think myself well paid if at the end of that time she vouchsafed me one gracious word."

"You have waited nigh upon a year," remarked Mr. Muir; "and she hasn't, apparently, given you even that."

"No; and she never will," answered Gorman. "There's the trouble. If I had only hope, only the ghost of a hope, I would serve for her as Jacob served for Rachel, and, were that possible, with a stouter heart."

"You'll never be like Jacob, I'm afraid, my man," retorted Mr. Muir. "Out of all the folk mentioned in Scripture he was, as well as I can gather, far and away the wisest. Only consider him when Laban wanted to get the better of the bargain in that matter of the sheep! What's that you're muttering? 'Plague take Laban and the sheep too!' Really, Gorman, I wonder at you, born and bred as you have been, in a Christian country, among Christian people!"

"Father," said Gorman, "hereafter, perhaps, in the long, lonely days to come, when I am a gray-headed, wifeless, childless, desolate man, I know I shall still say I would rather have loved Berna Boyle hopelessly, than married one of the Blood Royal and had the Crown Lands settled upon me into the bargain."

"You know best, of course."

"Yes, I think I do. Though I may never have even one sweet memory of fulfilment to look back upon, I shall always remember my short love-dream as the happiest portion of a life which might have been made useful to God, man, and myself—which I should have made useful, but for the cruelty of a girl you despise."

"That I despise! For the Lord's sake, Gorman, pay more heed to what you are saying. I don't despise Miss Boyle, or even that foolish creature the mother, who pays for all she has with a most proper punctuality. They're decent people, and have got good relations, but they *are* NOT RICH!"

"And if so, what then?"

"Why, you might be rich, that's all. You know as well as I do, though Mr. Garnsey bid you not make love to his daughter, he would give her to you to-morrow."

"I know that, and I know why."

"What's the why?"

"He wants a son-in-law who would make no inquiry about a sum of money which ought to have come to her under her grandfather's will; and, besides, if all I heard in Dublin is true, he has a mind to have a person staying at Beechfield he could scarce ask his daughter to stop in the house with."

"I see; but all that makes no odds to you. He gave you to understand Miss Garnsey would have five thousand pounds. Man! man! pause and consider; a face you've taken a fancy to may be very fine, but money's better. Think of all the diversion and satisfaction you might get out of a good income, and don't refuse the luck that's in a manner forced upon you, just because one girl's eyes are a trifle brighter than another's."

"If I cannot marry Miss Boyle, I shall die a bachelor," answered Gorman.

"Well, well, maybe that wouldn't be so bad a fate. 'After single a good wife's best,' you know. Where would you find a happier man than Mr. Cornelius Desmond? If you could give up this notion of that girl at Clear Stream, I would never speak to you again about Miss Garnsey."

"It is of no use. I cannot give up my notion; but I can go away."

"You sha'n't do that. I wish you had taken me into confidence long ago, but I hope it's not too late yet. The first thing you'll do, if you follow my advice, is get Mr. Vince on your side. He's no fool; and, as far as I can gather, he is none so fond of poor relations; he would, maybe, counsel Miss Boyle for her good."

"I do not want any one to counsel her. I would not take any wife who would only marry me because she was forced."

"Dear me, I am sure I can't tell which way to take you! Whatever you may think about Mr. Vince, though, I suppose you'll concede the mother ought to be told you want the daughter."

"I don't know who is to tell her. I won't."

"Somebody must; and I think Mr. or Mrs. Vince would be the best to break the news. I wouldn't wonder a bit if it was the thought of her mother's anger had something to do with the girl's refusal."

Gorman shook his head.

"Will you leave it to me?" went on his father. "Will you let me see what I can do among them all?"

"Yes; I will leave it to you," agreed the younger man, after a moment's hesitation.

"And will you try and behave yourself like a rational being: attend to your work and keep steady, and give Clear Stream a wide berth till I tell you to go there?"

"Yes; I think I can promise all that."

"You see, I understand from the old woman her daughter

is determined to go out as governess, and that Mr. Vince won't let his wife help her to get a place. He wasn't best pleased to find the girl at Craigvallen at home among them when he came back from London—there's nothing the widow doesn't let out—and it's very sure he'll never have her there again. If we mind what we are about, I believe the next time you ask Berna Boyle she will say 'Yes;' but don't be in too great a hurry to ask her. I think I can work the business if you will only have patience, though the Lord only knows what Bell will say when she hears all that is going on. She'll be like a woman demented."

What Mr. Gorman Muir observed in reply need not be chronicled. His comment dealt with the great Bell question in a summary and exhaustive manner.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THERE probably never existed a man who entertained a higher opinion of his own abilities than Mr. Muir.

He held a firm belief that if in his youth he had been what he called "learned" Latin, Greek, Hebrew, modern languages, music, and painting, he would have made a figure in them all. A doubt as to his grasp of intellect never occurred to him. He was wont to point to what he had done, and argue from thence as to what he could have done.

Living in the narrowest of narrow circles, associating on intimate terms with no one beyond the members of his own household, his self-esteem rarely met with any check; indeed, Bell was the only person who ever "took it upon her" to speak disparagingly concerning her father's "grip" of mind.

There is nothing safer than the assertion that it would be possible to move the world if we could find some place to stand while performing the operation.

Supposing, however, the place were found, matters might change their complexion; and so in like manner, had Mr. Muir been taught all the wisdom of all the schools, it is more than probable some one would have discovered he did not possess better brains than his fellows.

Management he believed to be his strongest point; from the pettiest detail of domestic economy to the government of kingdoms, Mr. Muir believed himself infallible. He knew houses where the "greatest of waste" was going on, and he was wont to hold forth for hours upon how differently he would manage, whether in the position of "Church or State minister." There were few things he liked so much as "putting things to rights" for other people, and it is consequently not

wholly inconceivable that he regarded Gorman's infatuation with secret complacency, affording as it did an admirable opportunity for putting his fingers into many pies, and extolling his own cleverness in extracting the fruit.

The first visit he paid was to Mr. Vince. On his way to Belfast he recited for the fiftieth time the many admirable remarks wherewith he proposed gaining over that gentleman to his side.

"He'll be only too glad to come round to my way of thinking," decided the farmer; having reached which satisfactory state of mind he found himself almost at the same moment standing on the step of Mr. Vince's office.

The difficulties which beset obtaining an audience "damped" his courage somewhat. They cut two ways, causing him to feel Mr. Muir was a person of less importance than he had supposed, and Mr. Vince a greater. He walked across the outer office, expecting at once to be ushered into the private room, as when he called by appointment; and, instead, he found it necessary to give his name and almost pray for admission before the question of even asking him to wait could be entertained. It hurt his vanity sorely to find no one he saw remembered him, or cared about him, or desired to be troubled with him. At least six persons asked him the nature of his business, and then the matter had to be referred to a "gray-headed old man," who "allowed" he might wait till Mr. Vince was disengaged, and then his message should be taken in.

Mr. Muir, whose hands were bare except for tan, was also greatly exercised in his mind by the fact that a young clerk could not run round to the Ulster Bank without first putting on his gloves.

"The whole lot of them," he said afterwards disparagingly, "were begun by Moses, and they'll be finished by Burgoyne;" which surnames referred to a well-known firm of tailors and an equally well-known individual who formerly kept a place of bodily entertainment in the passage running beside the

Belfast News Room which connects Donegall and High Streets.

"It is just wonderful," considered poor Mr. Muir; "and to think this man is full cousin to that half-witted widow my son wants to get for mother-in-law!"

"Kindly step this way," said a supercilious youth at this juncture; "Mr. Vince will see you."

If there were one place beyond another where Richard Charles looked more darkly, beautifully Presbyterian and respectable than another, it was in his office.

Predestination and election were writ large all over him. Nothing so light and frivolous as the Church seemed to have part or parcel in him. The cut of his clothes was founded on the Westminster Confession of Faith; the tie of his cravat and the solemnity of his shirt-front suggested the Shorter Catechism; whilst the gravity of his manners and the stern rigidity of his features could only have belonged to a man who knew the Longer off by heart, and had been "well grounded" in Chronicles first and second, and the books of the Kings of Israel.

All in vain Mr. Muir tried to assume an airy and easy manner. The atmosphere of Richard Charles's business sanctum proved too much for him. His remark, on being gravely asked to take a chair, that "sitting was as cheap as standing," produced simply no effect whatever. Mr. Vince might have been deaf so far as any response in tone, look, or manner indicated to the contrary.

"I was about to write to you, Mr. Muir," said the great man, in that voice which usually proves its owner to be a loyal Orangeman, a staunch Dissenter, a foe to the Pope, and an enemy to all those unfortunates who belong "to the back parts of Ireland."

"What about, sir?" asked Mr. Muir, for the time being well-nigh cowed by the spectacle of Richard Charles seated in his well-padded office-chair, before a great "leather-covered table bigger than the billiard-table at my Lord's," with his plain

heavy watch-chain, his stiff collar, and a face colder, harder, and more passionless than the farmer's own. No human being except Marcella, daughter of Theophilus Carpenter, Esq., deceased, had ever seen that face relax, the lines of that severe countenance soften, and even to her he was not always as wax in the hands of the moulder.

There were times when she felt it better to "hold back" and let the rigid demon which occasionally possessed her lord have the ground all to himself. She had not married for love, and she could afford to be wise; and yet there were times when, like Berna, she felt Craigvallen was not half sufficient purchase-money for the liberty and the possible future she had sacrificed when she said "Yes" to Richard Charles, and that marriage graphically described by Mrs. Boyle "came off."

"I was going to tell you," answered Mr. Vince, and his words had the same sort of power and weight that counting down sovereigns in the way of change produces on one who has been short, not merely of sovereigns, but of the smallest coin, "that after the first of next May I shall not hold myself responsible for the rent of Clear Stream Cottage."

Here was a collapse; but Mr. Muir rose to the occasion. As a tenant, Mr. Vince might be his superior—in money; yet, as a man, he was only his equal.

"I think," said the farmer, ignoring the word "know" simply from motives of politeness—and his tone, as he spoke, was Presbyterian and cautious as Mr. Vince's own—"if I remember me right, that in consideration of the lowness of the rent, and the alterations I agreed to make, and did make, it was arranged between us that a year's notice ought to be the time; but I'll say nothing more; I won't hold you bound. Between friends it ought not to signify."

Mr. Vince regarded his visitor with a stony stare. Friends, indeed! The owner of Craigvallen, a justice of the peace, the husband of Marcella, daughter of etcetera, a friend of a man who made his living out of land which he rented, cows whose milk was sold, hens that were sent to market—the suggestion

was impossible! Could the fellow have been drinking? Mr. Vince had never taken even a quarter of a glass too much wine in his life, but he knew other persons were not so abstemious; nay, did not a dreadful old reprobate who had been a boon companion of his uncle's on one terrible occasion offer to "stand treat" to Richard Charles, at the same time advising that gentleman "not to be backward"?

Imagination is sometimes very deceitful. At that moment Mr. Vince felt satisfied there was a smell of whisky in the air.

"I conceived," he said, "the arrangement to which you refer was intended to continue only for the first year; but if you place a different construction upon the matter, I will say the first of November. All I desire is to settle a date when I shall feel definitely relieved from all connection with Mrs. Boyle's affairs."

"You must have done a heap for her," remarked Mr. Muir.

"I have; and I should have felt willing to do even more had she met me in a proper spirit. But I need not intrude my private affairs on you, Mr. Muir. Shall we say the first of November twelvemonth?"

"No, sir; when a gentleman deals fairly by me, I hope I know how to deal fairly by him. I won't hold you beyond the first of May in next year. And now we have come to an understanding on that point I will, with your leave, give you a hint of what I have come to see you about to-day."

"Pray do not hint, Mr. Muir. If there is any matter with which you think I ought to be made acquainted, you may speak out quite freely. Perfect straightforwardness has been the rule of my own life, and it is one I have found work well."

"I don't doubt it; any one that sees what you are can't be off thinking you must have got on some good road to fame and fortune."

Once again Mr. Vince looked hard at his visitor, whose manner he decided was not respectful. The root of the evil

existed no doubt with Mrs. Boyle, and for the fiftieth time he determined to sever relations between that lady and himself.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to come to business, Mr. Muir," he said. "I have an engagement, and—"

"Certainly, certainly," agreed the farmer; but he got no further. He sat silent, considering how it would be best to open the pleadings.

"What you have to say bears reference to your present tenant possibly," suggested Mr. Vince.

"Well, it does in a way. You see, I have a son—"

"Yes, and he—"

"Though I say it, he is as fine a young man as you'd meet in a day's journey. He was brought up by his mother's uncle, Mr. Trevasson, of Mount Michael, in the county Kilkenny, who gave him the best of educations, and would have made him his heir if it hadn't been the old man took a notion to marry a young girl, which caused my son to get his marching orders."

"Rather hard on your son. He is out of employment now, I suppose?"

"No; that is not it either. He has taken to a business that is paying him right well, and out of which he might make a first-rate living if he'd stick to it. But of late he has got a bit unsettled; he has taken the notion of falling in love with the wrong person."

"I really am afraid, Mr. Muir, that is a matter in which it is not in my power to help you."

"I think it is. I am telling my story poorly. I wanted Gorman to come to you and tell it himself, but he wouldn't. He's terribly headstrong, though no better-hearted young fellow ever breathed. He might marry to-morrow the daughter of an estated gentleman, with five thousand pounds to her fortune, who belongs to a tip-top family; but he won't, for he has got the conceit he will have nobody in all the wide world but—Miss Boyle."

"Miss Boyle!" repeated Mr. Vince, genuinely surprised. "Do you mean Mrs. Boyle's daughter?"

"The very same. I can't but own it's a grief to me to see him flinging away his chances as a lad pelts pebbles into a river; still, I shall not try to cross his fancy."

"That is a matter, of course, for you to decide."

"I know that, and I have decided it; but there is a hitch. So far as I can gather, Miss Boyle thinks she is above my son—his superior."

"Perhaps she is. I have not seen your son, remember. I only suggest—"

"I understand. If you saw Gorman I am sure you would deem him every bit as good as your cousin's child—maybe better."

Mr. Vince winced. It does not follow that because a man has climbed from a very low rung of life's lofty ladder he likes constantly to be reminded of the fact.

"Pray understand," he said, "that I mean no offence when I say Mr. Boyle was a man of very good birth."

"And Gorman's mother was a woman well born. There is no better family in Donegal than the Gormans of Clonmellin. She ran away with me. Katty Gorman, that was her name; Katty Gorman."

"But somehow Miss Boyle does not see it," said Mr. Vince, ignoring Katty altogether.

"That is the case in a nutshell. For all my son is what he is, she does not look upon him with the favour she might. Till they have tried it, most young women think they can marry anybody. People similar to you and me, Mr. Vince, who have seen life and got a good hold of what the world is like, know better. It is not every man will take a girl without a penny piece in her hand; besides, there are other things against Miss Boyle; and though I may be willing to overlook, she ought to consider them. Therefore, what I thought was, if you would speak a few words to her, I'd take it very kind of you; very kind indeed. You might put the matter

sensibly before her, and she would mind you. I know she would."

"I could not do such a thing, Mr. Muir; I could not really; and, to be quite plain, I would not if I could. I must utterly decline for the future to mix myself up in Mrs. Boyle's affairs. I have had so much unpleasantness and—and ingratitude already that I am determined to sever the connection. Miss Boyle is, I doubt not, a most well-conducted and deserving young lady; but one cannot dissociate a daughter from her mother. If you want advice or assistance you had better apply to Sir Herbert Boyle. He is as near a relation as I am. But whether you go to him or not, I really must beg of you not to come to me again about the matter. In justice to myself and my family, I feel it only right to wash my hands of Mrs. Boyle;" and Mr. Vince waved his hands, as if to intimate he was thankfully finishing a very extensive wash indeed.

"Then there is no more to be said," remarked Mr. Muir, rising.

"There is no more to be said," agreed Richard Charles, rising also.

"And I'm very sorry I troubled you."

"Of course you could not know by intuition my sentiments on this unpleasant subject."

"If I had known you may be sure you wouldn't have seen me here."

"Thank you, Mr. Muir; that is precisely the observation I should have expected from a person of your excellent judgment."

"I'll bid you good-morning now, sir," said the man thus complimented; and as he went he thought those individuals who spoke ill of Mr. Vince "mightn't be so far wrong."

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHATEVER faults friends or enemies might feel disposed to attribute to Mrs. Boyle, she scored, in common with many celebrated generals, in the fact that she had gained one great victory.

Let people say what they pleased about her, nor man nor woman could deny she had made, when close on thirty, a very fine match—an extraordinarily fine match. If things did not turn out “as she had a right to expect,” the fault was not hers. A warrior or a woman can only annex an important territory. Fate and circumstances may occur to render its annexation, comparatively speaking, valueless, but the splendour of the conquest remains.

Mrs. Boyle was faded and poor, but no one could deny she had been the lawful wife and was the widow of Ulick Boyle, of Boyle Court. She had done all she could, and (socially) it was accounted unto her for righteousness. In the sight of many persons she was a woman much to be commended and admired. After her marriage, undoubtedly the stars, in their courses, fought against her, as they did against an even more unlucky individual, Sisera—but what of that? No blame could be attributed to Mrs. Boyle for a series of unfortunate accidents. The Boyle family might, for example, be considered wrong because they resolutely refused in any way to recognise Ulick Boyle’s wife. Other mothers and fathers after a time forgave their sons if those sons married for love. Not so the Boyles. From the day of his wedding till the day of his father’s death, poor Milly’s husband never crossed the threshold of his paternal home. And that was twelve long years after he first met Milly, dressed in her pink dress ornamented with

nine tucks, at the house of a dreadful Dublin usurer. Not "one farthing" did his father allow him during the whole of that time. What that stern parent wrote on hearing the news was—"I won't curse you, but you shall have no money I can keep you out of, and probably you will find that curse enough."

It was trouble enough, but greater followed. The first child, a boy, who might have "put things right," was born dead. Those acquainted with the Ulick Boyle *ménage*, and probably few women knew more about that establishment than Ruth, declared the lack of a direct heir was attributable entirely to Mrs. Boyle's own folly.

"As a married wife," said Ruth, who with the best intentions was sometimes in the habit of mixing her forms of expression, "she was just beyond conceivability. She wouldn't take any sort of care of herself. She was here, there, and every place, tearing about like a mad woman. There would have been a living heir right enough, if it hadn't been for a picnic-party she would go to at the Dargle. We were living out at Clontarf then, and poor Mr. Boyle—O, he was the peaceable man—begged and prayed of her not to think of it. He wouldn't have been seen at such a gathering, for they were a rough, wild lot; and after the wedding he always kept himself quiet and to himself, like a man broken-hearted. All the same she went, laughing and joking, and in the height of good spirits; and before the day was out I was sent for, and there had come an end to all the master hoped might bring him and his father together again. Miss Berna was born two years after that; and the way her mother went on about her being a girl was beyond belief."

However it may have happened, no baby boy appeared to heal the breach between father and son; and for more than twelve years Ulick Boyle drifted on in poverty. His grandmother allowed him something, and the usurers a little. Occasionally he had a haul on the turf; at other times he won a few pounds at billiards. Years passed, and his mother died; a few more sped by, and his father departed also. Then came

the glorious period of Boyle Court—at least the period which might have been glorious but for the debts Mr. Boyle had accumulated.

Loan after loan, bills renewed and renewed, interest and compound interest. Surely the divine Milly was entitled to no blame for these many calamities; on the contrary, who in her own rank of life could help commiserating the “deception” practised upon her?

Instead of stepping into a clear seven thousand a year, Mr. Boyle was forced to set aside a large slice out of his rent-roll for the benefit of a certain number of importunate persons Mrs. Boyle termed collectively “a pack of hungry wolves.” Further, he had to effect heavy insurances on his life; so once again, to quote Mrs. Boyle, “there was thousands going out before we could buy a loaf.” Originally the property had been mortgaged for a considerable amount, which no Boyle attempted to reduce. Ulick’s father might have done this. But if he ever even thought of sacrificing his own pleasure for the benefit of posterity, that ill-starred marriage with the enchanting Milly would have caused so sensible an idea to be abandoned.

Thus, one way and another, it came to pass that for years Mr. Boyle, of Boyle Court, was forced to live with the strictest economy, greatly to the vexation of his wife. As a child, Berna had been taken much notice of by her great-grandmother, who paid for her education, and would eventually have adopted the girl altogether had she been content to give up home, father, and mother. It was, of course, only Mrs. Boyle to whom the Dowager objected; but, as she remarked with terrible plainness, “You cannot have home and father without your mother, and if you want your mother you must make up your mind to do without me.” Berna made her choice, and Ulick Boyle, though almost mad with anxiety at the time, backed up his daughter’s decision.

For two years previously he had not received one shilling of rent. For two years he had been forced to borrow money for his own expenses and to keep up his life policies.

That was the time when two million of Ireland's inhabitants died or emigrated. The starving people could not pay what they owed; and Mr. Boyle, like others, was forced not merely to ask the patience of his old creditors, but to contract fresh debts. Still, he did not despair. The famine could not last for ever. Rents, he argued, would be paid again some day. Further, acting on the advice of a Scotch agriculturist, he began to rear sheep in large quantities, which he afterwards sent to fatten in the rich pastures of Munster.

And if there were wretchedness within doors, there was peace on the sea, on the hillsides, in the fastnesses of Mayo. Mrs. Boyle detested the sea, and, most happily, she could not ride. All the day long father and daughter were together, the unspoken trouble of the man's life drawing their souls more tenderly close. He had no fear concerning the girl's future. A few years more and he could so reduce his debts that the insurances effected for the benefit of his creditors would be available for his wife and child. Wildly extravagant in his earlier life, Mr. Boyle had long been so economical that his hope of eventually freeing his estate from all burdens except the original mortgage, and saving sufficient to portion his daughter, seemed by no means chimerical. But it was not to be. All in the fine spring weather, just when affairs, like the earth, were once more putting out shoots of promise for him, the end came—to care, business, pleasure.

He was strong and well one moment; the next he was lying with the life almost crushed out of his body: Berna kneeling on the ground beside him; a lad running madly for Mrs. Boyle to see her husband while still breathing; and a man rushing distractedly in search of useless help.

It was the story of a moment—the final page of one volume to Berna. If the poor, bruised man, painfully gasping out his last breath on the short, sweet grass, were capable of thought, his worst agony must have been for the lonely girl he was leaving. For the creditors literally took everything. Nothing remained save the pittance mentioned by Mrs. Boyle. She

might have obtained help ; both Sir Herbert and the Dowager had every inclination to let bygones be bygones, and afford substantial assistance, but the widow demanded as a right what they were only willing to accord as a favour. She was a woman who would not be saved, except in her own fashion. To be rid of her the Boyles would gladly have made her a sufficient allowance ; but they found the only possible means of severing the undesirable connection was to let her return to the poverty from which she had emerged.

Mrs. Boyle's own friends, who heard only one side of the story, were, of course, almost unanimous in the condemnation of her husband's family. Even Mr. Vince, who certainly felt no sympathy with his cousin, declared Ulick Boyle's conduct had been most reprehensible. "A man's first care should always be the welfare of his wife and family," he remarked sententiously ; which observation set Mrs. Vince thinking she was not sorry her own settlements had been drawn out very securely, and her future rendered as independent of any caprice on the part of Richard Charles as her father's lawyers could make it.

There was another point also concerning which Mrs. Boyle could count upon the commiseration of her girlhood's friends—Berna. That young person was an offence to the whole connection. Her voice, her manners, her accent, her appearance, her silence, stank in the nostrils of all her mother's friends.

Had she been rich, they would not have liked her ; being poor, they disliked her. A good bouncing, red-cheeked, forward girl, with "plenty to say for herself" and "lots of fun in her," would have received affection and sympathy ; but "this bit of sickly affectation," who "thinks herself too high and mighty to associate with one of us," was canvassed most severely in the circles Mrs. Boyle delighted to frequent.

There was no one who failed to pity the widow for being burdened with a girl "without a spark of life in her ;" and this pity was intensified when Mrs. Boyle began darkly to hint that

Berna, which name, by the way, she pronounced Burrna, was the sole obstacle which prevented a second settlement in life, even more satisfactory than the first. Having convinced herself that Gorman Muir was her contemporary if not her senior, Mrs. Boyle naturally failed to make any allusion to the little matter of disparity which might have troubled a wiser woman. With the cunning attaching to weak natures, she further refrained from all mention of who the HE might be who was dying for love of her.

"He is well-looking and well-connected, and brimming over with fun and spirits, which the Lord above knows Ulick Boyle never was, but Berna's face grows as black as thunder when he comes inside the door. She's as like her father as two peas. There never was one had a bit of merri-ment about him he could abide."

When a lady's friends form their ideal of a man "well-connected," "well-looking," "brimming over with fun and diversion," from some spirit merchant who has "big stores" in Church Street, or a sea captain from Newtonards "that has made more by smuggling than any other honest man in the Three Kingdoms," what is there to be said? Sweets to the sweet, sours to the sour, men to the women. Honestly, all Mrs. Boyle's friends believed she had taken another male creature captive to her bow and spear. Why should they doubt the fact? Incredible though it might seem, she had once secured Ulick Boyle, heir to Boyle Court and seven thousand a year. Given this at nine-and-twenty, why not at fifty a sea captain or a spirit merchant?

Why not, indeed?

Very freely the widow's prospects were canvassed among her connections; and if some were envious at Mrs. Boyle's "luck," all felt admiration for her power of winning men and her strategy in keeping them.

"Let Milly alone," exclaimed Miss Sheill. "It's herself knows how to take the length of a man's foot. I was wanting her to join me in starting a lodging-house at Bangor; but all

the time she was doing better for herself than I could have done for her."

And, indeed, Miss Sheill might be forgiven for falling into such a delusion. Mrs. Boyle had not merely discoursed at length to her friend concerning the match she was about to make, but actually hazarded a proposal that Matilda should share her prospective home.

"He'll never sit down content in one place year in, year out," she declared with sportive vivacity. "As it is, he is always starting off some place like a flash of lightning, and you may be sure he'd not care to leave me very far behind. I never saw a bit of life all the while I was married to Ulick Boyle. But it's a long lane has no turning, and I'll be having fine times yet. And so, as I was saying, if you like to come and live with us, and look after things while we're away, you'd be more than welcome. You never need black your hands, for we'll have servants in plenty. All you'd have to do would be keep an eye on them, for you know what they are, one and all; and you could put by the whole of your own small income, and then, if you saw anybody you thought you'd like, I'd be the first to say 'Leave us.' There's no selfishness about me."

With such prospects in store, Mrs. Boyle naturally forgot the compact entered into with Richard Charles. She went often to Belfast. She was to be seen of all men, flitting about the busiest streets of that thriving town. She had "eased her mourning," and quite decided the next new dress she bought should "at least have a lilac stripe in it." Trying though she had been as a young woman, she was more trying still as a widow. The world had gone on; manners had improved; but Mrs. Boyle had not gone on, and her manners had grown worse. Mr. Vince cut his cousin dead in Donegall Place, and Mrs. Vince refused to see her even though they met face to face in Gardiner's, where Mrs. Boyle and Miss Sheill were refreshing themselves with currant buns. Berna resolutely declined to accompany her mother on any of these campaigns.

She had quite made up her mind to leave home, even if she could at first get no salary, as a companion.

Mrs. Vince was inquiring for something likely to suit the girl, and Berna had written to the lady by whom she was educated to know if she could assist her design. This letter was returned to her, however, with the word "Dead" across the envelope. This word formed a text upon which Mrs. Boyle preached many sermons, the burden of all being,

"You see now what it is to be an undutiful child, setting yourself up against a mother that has sacrificed her life for you. It is a judgment upon you. Strangers are not so ready to have you. What you'd best do is try to conquer your sinful temper, and make yourself pleasant to a man that's willing to find a good home for me. I might have been married and happy long ago, if you had only behaved yourself."

"Well, mamma, I will not stand in your way one moment after I hear of a situation—*any* situation," said Berna passionately, breaking the silence she usually maintained. "I would rather be a servant, polish grates and scrub floors, than continue to lead the life I have led since we came here."

"Ah, you'll find out the difference, maybe, when it is too late," returned Mrs. Boyle, "when you have no home and no mother either!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MATTERS had arrived at this pass when Mr. Muir, scarcely giving himself time to recover from the smart of disappointment inflicted by Mr. Vince, dressed in his ordinary clothes, in which he felt he had "room to speak," and taking his courage in his hand, walked down to Clear Stream Cottage to say what he had to say to mother or daughter, or both. He rather wished to see both. He felt it might be "just a shade easier to talk to two women than one;" but nerving himself for either event, and with a strong conviction he should gain the day, he paced along the lane—now ankle-deep in dust, as it had once been pretty nearly knee-deep in mud—pondering, as he went, on the cross-cornerness of things in general, and of his children in particular.

Not one of them was "just to his mind" but Gorman, and Gorman wanted to throw himself away on a girl without a halfpenny, whose mother was a "flighty fool," when he had but to "ask and have" Lyle Garnsey's daughter, with "a big fortune and all the best houses open to her."

That the best houses would not open to Berna Boyle he felt too surely.

"With Miss Garnsey for his partner, a man of his knowledge and appearance might have visited both the Earl and the Marquis," he soliloquised, "and just played himself among the gentry. However, it is the Lord's will, and I must submit. I thought myself a made man when I let the cottage, never taking a notion about the trouble would come of it. Faith, Bell was right when she said we might hear too much concerning the cottage one day. Now, I wonder how she jumped at that?"

Mrs. Boyle had taken an early stroll into the village, so Berna was alone when Ruth ushered Mr. Muir into the little parlour. Drawing materials lay upon the table. During her mother's absence the girl had been trying to fill in a sketch of the Lough and the county Antrim shore. Instinctively, when Mr. Muir was announced, she threw a sheet of tissue paper over the cardboard.

Never did she feel in a less congenial frame of mind for listening to those compliments of which the farmer was so fatally lavish. Their earliest acquaintance had been inaugurated with some flattering comments that Berna knew she could never forget, even though she might forgive.

On the present occasion, however, nothing was further from Mr. Muir's mind than mere civility. He had come with a purpose to Berna, as he might have gone to a man; and he was steadfastly determined no undue time should be lost over preliminary courtesies.

Still, some commonplace phrases were essential, and the natural politeness of his nation supplied him with words.

"I hope I see you better, Miss Boyle?" he began.

"Thank you," she said; and in the light of a future daughter-in-law, her slight young figure, well-poised head, clean-cut features, and high-bred manner seemed good to this man who had risen from the people. "I am very much better—almost well again."

"You found the change to the shore did you good?"

"Yes, indeed. I shall believe in sea air again."

"Yet you are not far from it here. I mind well that Miss Garnsey's aunt, in the old man's time, used to drive over every day of her life and every month in the year, except December and January, to Holywood for the benefit of the salt-water bathing."

"Really! Bathing in the winter months must be extremely cold."

"Not it. The sea is always warmer in the winter than in the summer."

"How very strange! I am so sorry that mamma is not at home."

"I don't know that that makes much odds. It was with you I wanted a few minutes' discourse."

"With me, Mr. Muir?"

"Yes; you can guess what about. My son—"

"About Mr. Gorman?"

"About Gorman; no other. It's no news to you, I suppose, he is fairly breaking his heart over you?"

Berna sat silent for a moment, looking at Mr. Muir with an expression of absolute fear; then she remarked slowly,

"I should have thought anything your son had to say he could have said to me."

Mr. Muir laughed—a harsh, short, bitter laugh.

"Make no mistake about that. Gorman's not the sort to make love at secondhand; and if he were, I'm not exactly the one he'd choose to make it. What I want to understand is this: he has asked you to marry him, as far as I can understand, some half-dozen times?"

"He has asked me to marry him."

"And more than once?"

She inclined her head.

"It's a thing I wouldn't do myself. No; not for the best woman ever stepped on shoe-leather," said Mr. Muir, in a tone which clearly implied he did not consider Berna that woman. "If one I had a notion of, didn't like to take me, she might do the other thing. However, every one to his taste."

There was no reason why Berna should dissent from this statement, and accordingly she held her peace.

"When my son came home," went on Mr. Muir, with his right forefinger beating time to his words on the back of his left hand, "and settled on taking the hill farm, and buckled to work, and turned himself to getting money together, I thought myself a made man. I had little fear but that after a while he would marry Miss Garnsey, and that I would see both their

names in the newspapers among the quality gathered at the great parties the Earl and the Marquis give when they come across from England. I did not know what was going on here. It was a notion never occurred to me he had taken a fancy of you. He was as quiet about the whole thing as a mouse in a meal-chest. Even Bell—that's my eldest daughter—never suspected it was you were keeping him pleasant and content. When the matter was first broached to me, I declare anybody might have knocked me down with a feather, I was so dumfounded. I don't know what call there was to keep the whole thing so close."

"You may be very certain," said Berna, "it was not a subject I should have mentioned."

"And why not?" asked the farmer, aggrieved. "Most of you are glad enough to say you have got a lover, even if he's old and ugly, let alone a proper man like my son—a man any lady in the land might feel proud to be seen with."

"I should not have mentioned it," repeated Berna.

"You are a very out-of-the-way sort of young woman," retorted Mr. Muir; "but I don't know that I ought to quarrel with you for being able to hold your tongue—it is a thing not many among you can do."

Once again Berna did not answer. If there had ever been any hope before for Gorman, his father must have killed it.

"What I want to come at is this," he said. "Why do you treat my son as you are treating him? why, if you can't make up your mind to say 'yes' all at once, won't you give him now and then a kind word or a pleasant look?"

"I wish, Mr. Muir, you would not ask me these questions. I wish you had not thought it necessary to speak to me at all. I have tried to make your son understand that I cannot marry him, and I do not think any one else has a right to talk to me about the matter."

"You're wrong there. If a father sees his son going to the bad, he has a clear right to try and stop him. If he sees him brooding and wretched and miserable because a girl says she'll

have nothing to do with him, he would not be much of a parent if he didn't try and put things on a proper footing between them. Now, would he?"

"Perhaps not. Only in this case—"

"You mean it is of no use trying to put things square. That may be so; but I intend to strive my hardest. It's not my wish to flatter you, but I must say I consider you have sense beyond the common; and that is the reason I want to have a quiet talk with you."

"But, Mr. Muir, I have told your son I cannot marry him. Surely you can understand how painful it must be for me to repeat the same thing to you."

"It is not pleasant for me to hear; because, as I tell you, Gorman's heart is set on getting you. There is no use beating about the bush. If I could have chosen for him, you are not the wife I would have picked. I don't intend any offence by speaking out plainly; but I know he could have done better. I'm sure it's through no goodwill of mine he hasn't;" and, looking straight in Berna's face as he said this, Mr. Muir paused for her reply.

The girl did not reply. A swift wave of colour swept over her face and then ebbed away, leaving her even paler than before; but she remained silent. She opened her lips to answer, but no sound issued from them.

"I wonder you don't say you would be glad to see him well married," remarked Mr. Muir. "If you do not want him yourself, you need not begrudge him to another."

"Your son is, of course, at liberty to marry any one he pleases."

"We know that. He has no need to ask your leave. But he won't marry any one but you; and I should not care so much about his stopping single if it wasn't I am afraid he'll never do a day's good wanting you. So what I wish to get at is why you won't take him. Where would you meet another like Gorman, straight and handsome and clever? There is not one, poor or rich, but likes him. Why can't you, Miss

Boyle? Only tell me what he can do to please you, and he'll do his possible, I know."

"It is not that," answered the girl slowly. "I have no fault to find with your son. He is handsome and accomplished, but—"

"You can't fancy him?"

"I cannot marry him."

"Am I to understand you cannot marry him though you fancy him?"

"I did not say that, Mr. Muir."

"Then what did you say? or rather what do you mean? Why can't you marry him?"

"I was wrong in saying cannot; what I meant was that I will not."

"You will not?"

"I will never marry him."

"At least you can tell me why."

"No, I cannot."

"Well, this beats everything! If you have any reason, why won't you say what it is?"

"We do not always choose to give our reasons."

"I think a woman is bound to give a man some reason why she'll have nothing to do with him. It may seem a light matter to you for my son to offer you all he has—his hand and his heart, his love, his whole future; but it is serious, whatever you may consider. We have none of us got more than one life, and it is just his Gorman is willing to put in your charge. No man can bestow on a girl he is fond of more than he has; and when he does propose to bestow his all, I repeat she should give him some good reason why she refuses what he wants her to take, and not fling it back in his face as if it was beneath her to touch."

"I never treated your son's offer in that way."

"You are doing something very like it now, at any rate. 'You cannot marry him.' 'You will not marry him.' Not another word but that am I able to get out of you. That is

no answer to give a man ; say what is standing between you. Are you fond of anybody else ?”

“No.”

“Are you under any promise to another man ?”

“No.”

“Do you suppose your mother wouldn’t let you marry him ?”

“I have not thought about it.”

“Do you think he is not good enough for you ?”

She did not answer “Yes,” or “No.” She only remained like one compelled against her will to look at Mr. Muir, while he in his turn searched her face with keen eager eyes.

“Ho, ho !” he said ; “that’s the way of it, is it ? The wind sets in that quarter, does it ? Now only answer me one more question, and I’ve done. Have you no liking for Gorman at all ? Don’t be afraid of speaking out to me. I’ll make no bad use of anything you tell me.”

“I have nothing to tell,” she replied.

“Yes, you have,” he retorted ; “and I have a right to hear. Have you a hatred against my son ? No, don’t go. I would be sorry to put any constraint on you ; but I am purposed to keep you here till I get some sort of answer. I’ll put it another way—are you fond of my son ?”

“Please to let me go, Mr. Muir. You are hurting me.”

“I am sorry for that,” he answered ; “but I don’t mean you to leave this room till I get some sort of satisfaction. I came here meaning to thresh the matter out ; and now I am getting at the corn, I intend to finish the job. You won’t speak, won’t you ? Well, I will speak for both of us. You *do* care for my son ; you couldn’t look straight at me and say you are not in love with him ?”

“You really are hurting me. *Will* you take your hand from my arm, Mr. Muir ?”

“I’ll do that ; I have no need to hold it any longer. But before you go, I’d like well if you would say why you consider Gorman’s not good enough for you—in what way you think yourself above him ? You needn’t be frightened, I am not

going to touch you again ; I am only intending to stand with my back against this door till I come at the rights of your notion. He is as well-looking, to say the least, as you are ; he has more money than you own ; you have had no better education than he has ; the house where his uncle reared him was as good as Boyle Court, every bit ; if he has a farmer for his father, your mother was only Miss Vince, the daughter of old Sam Vince, whose dirty tricks were the talk of Belfast, and—”

“What can be wrong with the catch?” Mrs. Boyle, at this critical moment, was heard exclaiming. “Berna, open ! open ! What are you doing ? Why, Mr. Muir, and is it yourself ? I am heartily glad to see you. I did not know you were behind the door. I thought Berna had locked herself in for a bit of fun. What in the world ails the girl ? What’s wrong with her, Mr. Muir ?”

“I am sure I don’t know,” answered the gentleman thus appealed to. “I came over this morning to have a talk with her about my son, and perhaps she isn’t best pleased with what I have said.”

“She needed somebody to talk to her,” said Mrs. Boyle. “I am sure I have spoken till I am tired. The way she behaves herself is scarce to be believed. It’s no wonder Mr. Gorman has quit coming to the house, seeing the black looks he got whenever he showed his face—”

“Mamma !”

“O ! you’ll not stop me, now I have begun. I am very glad, Mr. Muir, you have been giving her a talking to. It’s out of the question, a friend can’t call without being affronted.”

“Then I may tell Gorman you have no objection to seeing him, Mrs. Boyle ?”

“Objection ! quite the contrary. He might know that.”

“And perhaps you’d favour the marriage ?”

“O Mr. Muir ! what marriage ?” asked the widow, with modest innocence.

“Why, your daughter’s. Gorman will never be happy till he has come with her from church.”

"You are not in earnest?"

"I only wish I was not," declared Mr. Muir. "I wish from my soul I was not. She has cast some spell over him. It's like witchcraft, neither more nor less."

For once Mrs. Boyle could not answer. She had dropped on the sofa, and sat staring at Gorman's father, looking like a card castle that has been suddenly demolished.

Had any one else told her this awful thing she would have laughed him to scorn; but there was that in Mr. Muir's face and Mr. Muir's manner which carried conviction with his words. Berna was a child no longer. She stood there a girl grown to woman's estate—her mother's rival. Gorman loved her. It was Ulick Boyle's daughter, not Ulick Boyle's widow, he wanted to marry. This was what had brought him to the house. Mrs. Boyle had never read Shakespeare, or she might have remembered several passages peculiarly applicable to her own position.

"Don't come near me!" she screamed, as Berna made a movement to advance to where she sat. "You're wicked enough already; don't add hypocrisy to your other sins!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“DON’T fret, Miss Berna dear. It breaks my heart to see you crying that way. The mistress didn’t mean to vex you. Half her time I don’t believe she knows what she is saying. There’s not one in the world she’s as fond of as yourself; and she has a good right to be fond. What mother had ever a better child?”

“It is quite true, though, that I ought to have told her long ago, Ruth.”

“And what good would telling her have been? She’d never have believed either of us. There is not another on earth could have convinced her she was wrong beside Mr. Muir. It is well she does know at last; for I am satisfied she’ll never let young Gorman set foot inside the door again, and that will be all the better, miss darling, if you are sure—if you are very sure—you do not want to see him.”

“I do not want to see him, nurse.”

“I hope it is so, dear; but my mind misgives me. There is a look in your face lately it hurts me to see. Through all the sorrow and trouble you had to pass through, I never saw anything like it there before. First love, like first grief, is hard to bear.”

“I am not in love, Ruth.”

“Maybe you’re not, Miss Berna; if so, best so. But I’d have you be very certain before you send him away from you for ever. It would be a sore thing for you to find out afterwards you wish you had not.”

“I shall never find that.”

“I am not so confident. O, I wish you could have made up your mind to lay your heart open to Mrs. Vince. She’s wise and she’s clever.”

"And she married a person I would not have married had there not been another man on earth," finished Berna. "How she could do it I cannot imagine! How such a woman could forget her birth and stoop to such a match passes my comprehension."

"I do not want to cross you, dear; but no matter what you may think of Mr. Vince, he is much thought of and considered. He has got on past the common. I mind his father when he wasn't a bit better off than Peter Doey; and just look at the houses where Mr. Vince visits now. The world is changing very fast, Miss Berna; birth had a long reign of it, but I'm thinking money's the king now."

"Ruth, there is something I wish to say to you—something I must say—as I might to the grave."

"What is it like, my lamb?"

"It is this: it is about my mother. I have always been loyal to her, haven't I? My father was loyal to her. You never heard either of us speak a disrespectful or slighting word about her."

"No, that I never did."

"And you know I love her."

"Yes, I'm sure you do; if you didn't you could not put up with her."

"Ah, Ruth, do not say that; and yet it is true. I never remember the time when the difference between my parents was not a trouble to me. I felt they could not both be right."

"Don't talk about it, my dear darling, if it hurts you."

"I must talk about it, Ruth. I could not say a word to any one but you, because you can't help knowing that my poor, poor father threw away his life. You understand what I mean, nurse. Without blaming my mother, I—"

"Your father married below him, Miss Berna. That is the outfall of the whole matter. I am not going to speak against your mother, who is a kindly woman in her way, though trying. I have eaten her bread and am beholden to her and hers, but she wasn't your father's equal. Old Sam Vince was just a

rough sort of man, free and good-natured. Many a sixpence he has given my mother when she needed it, and where would I be now hadn't your mother remembered me? Still, dear, they were none of them the right sort for a Boyle to consort with, and—"

"Ruth," and the girl's fingers clutched her nurse's shoulders, "I can tell you now what I wanted to say. There has been one mistake made in the family; there shall not be another. It is enough that I have often wished to shut my ears and cover my eyes when I have seen and heard my mother doing and saying things I am sure my father's widow ought neither to have done or said."

"Yes, Miss Berna; but what has all this to do with young Mr. Muir?"

"If, with such an experience behind me, I married Gorman Muir, what then?"

"I haven't a notion, dear. Can't you tell me your meaning out—that is, if it won't vex you?"

"No, it does not vex me much—only, Ruth, if I find it hard sometimes to feel ashamed of my own mother, how could I bear being ashamed of my husband's father? I am fond of her, and I am not fond of him. I cannot bear even to look at him. Not a word he speaks but grates upon me. His very voice is an offence."

"Yes; but it is not old Mr. Muir wants you to marry him."

"I should have to associate with all the family, though. And there is another thing, too. Even supposing I liked young Mr. Muir greatly—"

"Which you do," thought Ruth.

"Setting aside all consideration of his relatives, I should be afraid to marry him."

"Why, miss dear?"

"Because children do take after their parents, let people say what they choose. They may seem different while they remain young; but as they grow older the same traits develop. There is nothing more likely than that Gorman Muir will one

day become as coarse and rough as his father. I see a great change in him of late."

"A man can't take to drinking, ever so little, without it showing on him," remarked Ruth apologetically. Few of her rank in any country are apt to be severe on such an indiscretion.

"I feel precisely as a man might feel about marrying me. I do not think any one in a good rank would like to do so, dreading I might some time begin to talk as mamma does often."

"You are terribly wise for your age, Miss Berna; but I am not just sure you are speaking very good sense now. What would hinder a gentleman marrying you because the mistress says a foolish word now and again? and why wouldn't you marry Mr. Gorman, though his father is whiles rough in his way, and common-mannered? The son has had the best of learning, and there is no one could find fault with his looks or ways. He would be steady enough, too, if he had a wife he was fond of."

"It seems to me, Ruth, you have taken a brief from Mr. Gorman Muir."

"No, Miss Berna, I haven't; but I can't rid my mind of the notion that, situated as you are, it might be well for you to settle soon. If you had a house of your own, and a man that would be good to you, it would be easier than governessing."

"I did not think, nurse, I should ever hear you say any husband was better than not getting married."

"I never said anything of the sort; but he's often a good deal better than none."

"If I did not like 'governessing' I could leave it; but I could not leave a husband."

"There is something in that; but not very much. It's not likely you'd want to leave him."

"And, besides, there was that story about his uncle's wife. You may forget; but I do not."

"We don't know how much truth there was in that, if there was any."

"At any rate, we do know what Mr. Muir is, and Miss Muir, and Miss Sarah, and even that pretty little Mrs. Craigland are. No, Ruth, I could not do it. Have I not seen enough of the people mamma associates with? Think, if it annoys me to have to visit at their houses or see them here, what I should feel were I related to them. It would kill me," added the girl, with passionate conviction. "Fancy my calling Mr. Muir father! Why, I should expect to see my own rise from his grave."

"If you feel like that, dear, it's best you should have nothing to do with the son; not that it seems to my thinking there would be the smallest occasion for you to call old Mr. Muir anything of the kind. He wouldn't be your father any more than the mistress would be the young man's mother. I have a notion myself making out people relations who are no blood to one another is foolishness, and I'm very sure good never comes of it."

"Still, it was hard for my mother that no one of the Boyles treated her as belonging to them."

"Don't forget, Miss Berna, that your father's was a rash marriage."

"And so would mine be if I chose one of the Muirs," retorted Berna. "Now, nurse, we will never talk about this again. I have told you what I could not have told to any one else. As soon as I can hear of any situation I mean to accept it, even if in Belfast. Mamma will be able to do very well without me. You heard her say so."

"She was put out then, and you mustn't vex yourself over what she says sometimes. All the same I wish you could have thought as you do now when the Dowager wanted you to go to her. I'd be a proud woman to-day if I knew the child I nursed was placed, as she could be, in a grand house, with servants to wait on her and carriages to drive in. O my darling! it sometimes breaks my old heart to look at you

here, and consider how you might have been situated. And all for nothing, too; because the mistress would have been happy as the day is long just running from one house to another, talking about you and making believe she was the worst used woman on earth. She's going off again to-morrow to Mrs. Gray. I wonder how long she has been at home since we came here?"

"And you know, Ruth, Mr. Vince has written to say he will neither pay this rent nor allow us any more money after the first of next May."

"I am sure nobody could blame him. The way the mistress has gone on about his being a kinat* is beyond belief."

"But what is she to do, Ruth?"

"I wouldn't trouble myself about that, miss. When one door is shut another is open. The mistress has never wanted yet, and it's not likely she ever will."

"One thing is quite certain—she cannot, even if I am able to obtain a salary, remain on here."

"Well, and what matter? She's sure of her money, so much a year, as long as she lives; and there's not one among the lot she consorts with but knows that. Some of them will make her welcome enough when May comes, and there's a heap might happen betwixt this and May."

"But you, nurse? but you?"

"My darling, don't be troubling your head about me. There's always some hole little folk can creep into, and it's not here as it was in the county Mayo. Somebody will find work even for as old a woman as I am. There's a heap of work in me still. And so there ought to be. Look at the life I have led. I never knew a hardship since the mistress sent for me to go to her. I have had good food and a soft bed and an easy time of it; and I saved money. Each quarter I put something by."

"Do you think I do not know that you have lent all you had to mamma?"

* Probably "gnat."

“Not all ; indeed and indeed, not all. I have lots left, and it is far safer with the mistress than me.”

The girl looked sorrowfully at her nurse, with eyes that were swimming in tears.

“Dear, dear Ruth,” she said, “how I wish I were rich, for your sake !”

“And I wish, Miss Berna, you were rich for your own—that is, if it was the Lord’s will that you might be happy, too.”

“Berna, Berna,” Mrs. Boyle called out at this juncture, “where have you got to ? I want you to put a stitch in my gown. That spiked fender has tore all the gathers out.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONE day The Serpent called on Mr. Muir. It was not by any means the farmer's first visit from that subtle beast, any more than Eve's initial interview with him was her last.

Temptation was not quite a stranger to Mr. Muir, though perhaps he called it by another name. He did not distract his soul by any undue resistance to sins which were in his nature. Had he ever argued the matter out, he would probably have told his conscience that "as it came to the same thing in the long-run, there was no use making any disturbance at the onset." He caused no such disturbance. If he felt disposed to do wrong, why, he did wrong, though few persons would have felt more astonished than he, had wrong been imputed to him. Besides, he felt he was always so thoroughly right! Take, for example, his observance of the Sabbath-day. Other persons, many other persons, harnessed their horses on a Sunday, but Mr. Muir had never followed their bad example since the minute he entered into possession of Kilmoon.

When his second wife was taken ill one Sunday he refused to send for a doctor on account of the commandment to do no manner of work, and ill-natured people were quick to hint he was not sorry to take advantage of so valid an excuse for delaying the application of remedies.

In the course of his life Mr. Muir had swallowed whole trains of camels, but on the subject of gnats he held the soundest of doctrines. He and Gorman had once come to high words because the young man insisted on giving his horse a drench after morning service.

"You'll have no luck," said the farmer mournfully, as he

saw his son going out with a soda-water bottle stuck in his pocket.

It was the same with most other matters. Whatever he did or left undone was right in Mr. Muir's eyes; but at last the enemy of mankind suggested an idea about the execution of which the farmer confessed to himself there "might be doubts." Across the quiet fields of Ardilaw the tempter advanced with soft, steady steps, not crawling like a serpent, but walking upright in the person of Mr. Lyle Garnsey. The corn had been all cut, the last "stook" set up; the hillsides were picturesque with the golden grain piled thus upon them. It was the most gorgeous period of the year in Ireland. The gorse hedges were a mass of glowing colour; the heather was in flower, the mountain-tops were purple with it, and the air was fragrant by reason of the scent of wild thyme; in the close short grass, where the sun shone warm, grasshoppers sang their quaint monotonous song; the treacherous depths beneath the Gobbins were blue as the butterflies flying above the rocky nooks and crannies, where thousands and thousands of sea-gulls make their nests; and dragon and glorious butterflies flitted through the air. A great rest and beauty characterised the fair, peaceful landscape, when across the stubble, Mr. Garnsey, dressed in gray trousers, black velveteen shooting-jacket, straw hat, and low shoes, came picking his way towards Gorman's father.

"As usual," he said, "first to finish. How *do* you manage, Mr. Muir?"

"I think it is with the aid of a heap of over-looking," explained the farmer modestly; for though conscious of his superior merits, he did not wish to make a "brag of them."

"But, good heavens, I am always looking!" declared Mr. Garnsey.

"Ay, but even in that there are two ways."

"Good and bad, eh?"

"I did not say that; only one way may be better nor another."

"That is merely your courteous mode of putting the matter, Mr. Muir."

"I meant no reflection on you, Mr. Garnsey. I don't need to be told there's no call for an independent gentleman like you to be considering quarter-hours, and how many potatoes are cut in a day, as I must do if I am to keep my family and pay my rent. What I started to remark was this: there are men in my own way of life who never can make the two ends meet, who are for ever and always getting more and more behind, because they try to do too much. They'll have reapers in one field and men sowing mangolds in another. It's just a physical impossibility they can be in both places at once. D'ye see what I mean, sir?"

"Of course I do."

"And there's lots among the small gentlefolk—I am saying nothing about an estated man like yourself, but trifling sort of 'quality'—who really should take heed as to what's to become of them and their children, who'll rent a farm like this and just dander about it as you might about your pleasure-grounds. They'll fetch a labourer off digging a drain to cut a straying bramble branch out of the hedge. They'll call off a man thrashing to help churn—that's two they'll set idle; then they'll get tired and go in and read the newspaper; after that, maybe, some friend of the wife's coming down, and they need the windows cleaned. I declare to my conscience," added Mr. Muir, "I often wonder how they rub on at all. Now, there's Mr. Begg, over at Meadow View. It wouldn't put the surprise on me in the least if any day I saw him bankrupt."

"It would not surprise me," agreed Mr. Garnsey. "Only see how his daughters dress, and his son now drives a tandem! No less! As usual, Mr. Muir, I have learned a great deal from you even in a few minutes. The moral of your discourse seems to me to be, 'If you try to farm your own land, take one field at a time, and never call a labourer off a job.'"

"Though there's nothing under the sun they like better."

"You are quite right on that point. When your son's

vagabond friend, Mr. Doey, condescended to take my wages and had the run of his teeth in my kitchen, there was nothing delighted him more than being sent on errands. That was the only part of his work he ever did willingly."

"It's an idle sort of way men that are paid by the day fall into," remarked Mr. Muir, with a lofty comprehension of all the pits farm-labourers are apt to tumble into when not upheld by the strong arm of an employer determined to "stand no nonsense."

"What a heavenly day, is it not?" said Mr. Garnsey.

"It is that," answered Mr. Muir; "there is no manner of fault to be found with the weather—"

"Except precisely the same fault as no doubt our friend Peter is finding with his easy berth."

"What is that, sir?"

"Too good to last."

"I have heard no word of my son parting Peter," said Mr. Muir, genuinely surprised.

"Perhaps not; but it seems scarcely likely that, great though his affection for the admirable Doey may be, he would care to take him for a travelling companion."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Garnsey."

"Come, come, that won't exactly do with me," said Mr. Garnsey, laughing, as if there were some capital joke hidden in the farmer's utterance, which he was enjoying enormously. "When all the village understands, it is useless for the tenant of Ardilaw to affect ignorance."

"If you have got anything to say, sir, I wish you would say it plain. I have had too much on my mind lately to leave it any great freedom for guessing riddles."

"That is just the matter in point. You have had your son on your mind. I don't wonder at it; and we all know he has not been a very light load."

"I don't see what call anybody in the village—or, if it comes to that, anybody in the county—has to meddle in affairs that are no sort of concern of theirs."

"Neither do I ; but still bodies will meddle. Even you, Mr. Muir, are not quite above the common weakness of talking over, and gossiping about, your neighbours' business ; and, as you have always held your head pretty well up, and passed for a wise man, you may be very sure that if your ears are not burning it is from no lack of gossip about you and your son."

"What does any man say about my son ?" asked Mr. Muir defiantly.

"Why, for one thing, many men, most men, say you won't have him at home very long ; and some men, most men, go on to remark the sooner he leaves here for his own sake the better. He has certainly taken the disease very badly. Considering his age and his experience, I don't know that I ever came across a worse case of love-fever."

Outwardly, Mr. Muir was both a moral and a religious man ; but he did mutter a very bad oath as he half swung himself round till he stood almost with his back to Mr. Garnsey.

That gentleman laughed again. "I would not take it so much to heart if I were you," he advised. "Gorman has been heavily hit, no doubt, but so have we all in our time. He will get over it just as we got over it. The disappointment won't kill him any more than it killed us. 'Men have died,' as you have perhaps heard before now, Mr. Muir, 'and the worms have eaten them, but not for love.' He won't die ; I daresay he won't even have delirium tremens. Still, it must be very hard for you. Ah ! dear, dear ; when I remember the first day you brought him over to see me, and what a proud man you were, and how little we could foresee all this trouble and the muck he is running now, I feel very sad for you ; I do, upon my word."

Mr. Muir did not answer. With averted head and a raging spirit he stood impatiently digging holes in the ground with his heel, the while Mr. Garnsey regarded him with amused enjoyment.

"It is confoundedly hard upon you," he repeated, in a tone

of the sincerest sympathy. "I cannot express the sorrow I feel."

Mr. Muir's heart was hot within him. Had he been beaten in a boxing-match, or worsted in a lawsuit, or only come third in a race, he would not by comparison have cared; but to know it was the talk of the country-side that his son had been refused by a girl, and such a girl—poor, only ordinarily good-looking, with the cracked daughter of old Sam Vince for mother, a "young jade" who ought to have been only too thankful to "leap" when Gorman said "jump"—the thing was outrageous.

"As you appear to know such a heap about us all," he said at last, turning a hard set face towards his landlord, "it would serve no useful purpose for me to deny that things are bad enough; still, they are not so bad as you think for."

"Delighted to hear it. Am I to conclude your son *is* going to remain on here—that he has no intention of 'hanging his harp on a willow-tree'?"

"If he has any design of the sort, he never mentioned it to me."

"Then what I came over to-day to say is of no consequence. However, as I am here, and as no one ever knows how matters may turn, I will just mention that if he ever should wish to leave in a hurry, he need not trouble himself about the farm. I'll break the lease for him with pleasure. Of course, I know the land could be of no use to you, so I won't, under the circumstances, hold your son to his bargain. If he wants to go, don't let Finney's Farm keep him. He has acted very well and straightforwardly by me, and I could not think of taking advantage of him."

"You are past the common considerate, Mr. Garnsey—wonderful considerate, to be sure," said Mr. Muir, with a humility which hid a sneer.

"Well, I took to the young fellow from the first; and I don't like to hear the stories I can't help hearing about him. Further, you know, seeing is believing; and I have seen that

your son is getting himself mixed up with a very questionable lot—very questionable indeed. Neither you nor I ever posed for a saint; but there is a difference between that and going to the dogs—and all because Miss Boyle can't care for him. In our wildest days we were wiser than that—eh, Mr. Muir?"

"I am very sure there never was a time when, if a woman hadn't wanted me, I'd have troubled my head about her. But what I can't get over with this girl is that she does care for him."

"Then why don't they get married, and quit caring? There's only one cure for love, you know—matrimony."

"I can't get out of her, and neither can anybody else, what her notion is," answered the farmer, who was determined not to make a confessor of Mr. Garnsey. "She has some reason she won't tell that's still strong enough to keep her from saying she's inclined to my son."

"But is she inclined to him?"

"If she is not, then never was maid fond of a man yet."

"Do you think it is the mother—though that certainly ought to prove a greater obstacle to your son than to anybody else?"

"No, I cannot conclude it is the mother, and if it were I don't know who would heed her."

"I shouldn't, for one. What a flighty old fright she is! considers herself irresistible, too! When she first came here she tried walking in the middle of the road, right under my horse's nose, in order to strike up an acquaintance. I sickened her of that, however. I nearly rode her down a couple of times. 'Are you set to kill me?' she asked. 'Keep out of the way, then,' I said. 'There's a side-path—that is for you; the road is for me.'"

"She's a wonderful old woman," remarked Mr. Muir.

"She is; but she has got a pretty daughter—that is, if you believe her to be Miss Boyle's mother. I do not. I feel quite convinced that girl has got another mother somewhere. Perhaps there is the mystery of her refusal."

"No, it is nothing of the kind ; it just is that she has put her foot down on 'No,' and having done that, all the talking in the world won't make her lift it to 'Yes.'"

"Yet you say you believe she is fond of your son."

"I can't doubt it. I would wager something she loves the very ground he walks on."

"Humph! it is all very strange. I think if I were young again, and thought a girl cared for me, I'd have her, no matter how coy she might be. So far as I can judge, lovers of the present day are wonderfully faint-hearted. What do you say, Mr. Muir? would you sit pining in one house and leave your sweetheart pining in another merely because she was proud, or timid, or shy?"

"I can hardly tell you what I might do."

"I should have thought, now, your son was not the young man to stand much nonsense of that sort. I'd have expected him to run off with any young woman he had a mind to marry; but, however, as I said before, times are changed since we went courting, Mr. Muir."

"Maybe; but I have a notion flesh and blood is much about the same as it ever was."

"Perhaps so; still, I doubt it. When you find opportunity, Mr. Muir, tell your son what I say about the farm. He will be far better out of this. Good-bye; I am heartily sorry for you."

And having thus spoken, Mr. Garnsey retraced his way over the stubble, leaving Mr. Muir to contemplate at his leisure the apple, ripe and ruddy, round and tempting, it had been hinted would prove most exceedingly good to eat. How long was it before Eve stretched forth her hand and plucked the fruit of the tree? Presumably not long. Days, however, passed, and found Mr. Muir in all his "spare time" gazing at the apple he felt steadfastly determined to have no "say to."

"Notions of that description may come natural enough to a loose-living man like Lyle Garnsey; but I never have taken

act or part in anything rash or wrong myself," considered the farmer.

"I wonder, now," he went on, "how it comes no thought of the kind chanced to get into Gorman's head? I am right glad he was not at hand to hear what Mr. Garnsey said. He is whiles reckless; and we know it would be the height of wickedness. Still, many a man has done it, and got a good wife too. They do say Mr. Desmond's great-aunt was carried off that way. She had a fine fortune."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONCE again the same apartment as that in which the reader first made acquaintance with Miss Bell Muir, unchanged in any respect save that a fire of turf smouldered within the grate. No difference in chairs, tables, arrangement, ornament. The seasons might alter, external nature don a fresh aspect ; but no apartment influenced by the fair Bell was in the smallest degree likely to vary its appearance.

“As she found things she left them,” said that young woman, which was probably the reason why all the linen, and all the silver, and all the damask, and all the feather-beds, and all the best china, left behind by a mother “fit only to be a saint in heaven,” who possessed a lighter hand in pastry and as cool a hand in butter-making as Bell, were as good as when she departed for a world where, presumably, teapots, Britannia or otherwise, are unknown, since even the most careful housewife cannot carry them across the frontier.

At all events, there was the room, and Bell and her father, as when the reader first entered it. And yet not quite : then Miss Muir was shirt-making and her father splicing his whip ; on the occasion of this interview Miss Muir was knitting a stocking, and Mr. Muir doing nothing at all except looking at his daughter.

“Well, I don’t know,” said genial Bell.

“Then why do you speak ?” asked Mr. Muir.

“There is not much use speaking ; but a body cannot always sit dumb.”

“A man that lived with you might pray to be deaf,” retorted Mr. Muir.

The improvement in manner, or rather the slight restraint

in language, caused by Gorman's presence, had long ceased to be apparent, and the Muirs were once again as rude to each other as the most affectionate family could desire. The most perfect freedom of speech prevailed at Ardilaw; old habits had been resumed like old clothes; they were easier than the Sunday garb, assumed for the benefit of Mr. Trevasson's nephew. What becomes of the liberty of home, if the inmates have always to be on their best behaviour? Gorman, who was but little in the house, had deserted his own room, and now sat "with the rest," snapping at and quarrelling with his sisters, as naturally as though "reared among them." Few traces of the "breeding that came with him from Kilkenny" were to be seen. The downward path is easy—apparently the young man found it eminently so. He "flung out" at Bell like a vicious horse; and Bell attacked him as though she had been a tigress. Mr. Muir's pride and vanity were often sorely hurt by his son's degeneration; but, upon the whole, he personally felt the same relief in getting down off his high horse that he might in taking off a pair of tight boots and thrusting his feet into easy slippers.

"Among quality he could hold his own with any one of them still," thought the farmer, solacing himself when he heard Gorman answer his sister in kind; but the young fellow had fallen a great depth, all the coarser side of his nature had obtained ascendancy. It was not merely the wild blood, the untrained nature, the animal instincts so long kept in check by prosperity and civilisation, which were asserting themselves, but he had actually deteriorated. He had gone down amongst the common herd of profligates, and the very fashion of his countenance was changed in consequence. As a man cannot pass through fire without being burned, so a man cannot sin without some hint of the wrong he has done being written, more faintly perhaps than in his soul, but still written, across his face.

Doey was right. Gorman had got the bit between his teeth, and was galloping straight for a place not often men-

tioned, except from the pulpit, in the hearing of decent people ; and in every defiant movement of his body, and in every handsome feature, in every word he spoke, there was a change, which told some evil spirit had overshadowed him, and turned everything his fleshy tabernacle held of good to bad. Just as in some garden we occasionally see all that was green and fair and beautiful over-night—all buds of promise, all flowers of grace—blighted and killed by one night's unseasonable frost, so the poetry, the chivalry, the greatness, and the grandeur of Gorman Muir's character seemed nipped and destroyed by his mistress's coldness.

Men have done the same before ; men will do the same again. It is an old, old story ; yet when the hand which writes these words is cold, and the eyes that read them are closed for ever, it will still strike some loving heart with a new and horrible surprise that son, or brother, or friend, can let any trouble gain such a mastery over him as to ruin his life on earth, and peril his hopes for eternity.

Gorman Muir was doing this. He was, so Isabella had put the matter, "biting off his nose to spite his chin ;" and she had been delivering her sentiments and opinions at great length when Mr. Muir stopped her.

There ensued a silence broken only by the maddening click-click of her knitting-needles. Bell could always get through about double the amount of work when in a bad temper ; probably that was the reason she knit three rows right round during the time she sat and said nothing, and Mr. Muir considered his daughter's words of wisdom. At length he lifted his head and asked,

"What makes you say Gorman won't stop over the winter with us?"

Had she been deaf and dumb Miss Muir could not have taken less notice of this inquiry than was the case.

Mr. Muir paused, then he "surveyed" Isabella before he asked,

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I heard—"

"Then why don't you answer?"

"It is better to hold my tongue than cause offence."

Mr. Muir looked up at the "tawse" suspended above the mantelshelf, secretly longing to take it off the nail and chastise his daughter. No one could have accused him of sparing the rod when she was a child; but he now repented he had not "laid on" with greater frequency and fervour. At that moment he could have found it in his heart to thrash Bell soundly.

"God help the husband gets her!" he thought; then added aloud,

"Who's talking of offence? I asked you a plain question, and I expect a plain answer."

"What was it you asked? Maybe I don't rightly mind."

Instead of repeating his previous inquiry, Mr. Muir spoke a very naughty word.

"I wouldn't swear if I was you," remarked Miss Muir.

"If you were me it's hard to say what you might do," retorted her father; "as hard as to say what I *will* do if you don't give me a civil answer."

"What do you want me to answer?"

"Why you deem Gorman's thinking of leaving us!" thundered Mr. Muir.

"Goodness me! Is that all? You needn't shout so; don't put yourself in a temper about nothing."

"Are you going to tell me, or are you not?" asked Mr. Muir, half rising from his chair.

"There's no call for you to stir," observed Bell; "it's a great pity you trouble your mind so much about one that doesn't trouble his mind much about you."

This time Mr. Muir rose in earnest.

"If you're set not to tell me," he said, "I suppose nobody can make you;" and he strode across the floor and had his hand on the lock, when his daughter observed,

"I believe you wanted to know why I thought Gorman meant to take himself off. There is no secret about the

matter, as far as I am aware. He told me he wouldn't be here long."

"That's nothing."

"Have your own way of it, then ; only never say afterwards I didn't give you fair warning. You'll have to try and do without him before you are much older. He is purposed to leave Ardilaw, and the county Down, and Ireland. He doesn't seem to think there is room here to be wicked enough."

"Where does he think, then, he'll find room enough?" asked the farmer. He was still grasping the handle of the door, and his voice was harsh with suppressed emotion as he put this question.

"He is going to try Australia. He says if he knew any place further off he'd go there. You made sure you were doing a fine thing when you refused Sam Dopp the cottage. Maybe you'd have fared better with his pigs, poor dumb beasts, than with Miss Boyle, you were so taken up about."

Mr. Muir did not answer. He opened the door and walked out. He went up the hill and looked mournfully at the horses, in which Gorman had long ceased to take pleasure or interest.

"I'm thinking you'd best be considering what you'll do with this land when your son leaves us altogether," were the pleasant words with which Peter greeted him. "He's not on for stopping in Down, I'm very certain. I'd not be surprised to hear any day we needn't expect to see him again. Love's a terrible thing when a man takes it as he has done. It may be all very well, but I call it foolishness myself. It's not as if there wasn't another woman in the world but one."

Mr. Muir looked at him almost piteously as he answered,

"You see, he can't look at it in that way."

"More's the pity, for it is the only sensible way."

"Do you know when he is coming back, Doey?"

"No more than a babe unborn. He leaves me with all the weight and care of the stock on my mind, and never says what he wants done or left undone. I'm getting very tired of it, and so I mean to tell your son."

"Here he is," answered Mr. Muir; "you can tell him now."

"O, I'm not going to meet him open-mouthed," said Doey. "I know when to speak and when to hold my tongue. I'll take a suitable opportunity, never fear, but it won't be when he comes dragging his feet across the grass that way. Did you ever see the like of his face now? why, his brow is as black as night. He is dangerous."

Gorman's brow was black. He scarcely spoke to his father, and he uttered no syllable to Peter, except to bid him "get shoes put on the bay mare, and take her to that address."

"I have a word I want to say to you, Gorman," began his father, as Doey went to catch the mare

"Say it, then," returned the young man sullenly.

"Is it true, as Bell informs me, that you are thinking of going to Australia?"

"Quite true, unless I change my mind and first kill Berna Boyle, and then blow out my own brains."

"I would not do that. Your brains are your own, to do what you like with, of course; but I think you might turn them to some better use."

"What better use?"

"Considering, as nothing else will serve you, if there's no way you could coax the girl to reason."

"I don't know what you mean," said Gorman. "You know she'll listen to nothing I have to say. She won't even speak to me now. I met her as I was coming home, and she turned her head away, as if the very sight of me was hateful."

"Did she?" exclaimed Mr. Muir, and his face grew dark as Gorman's own. "Faith, if it was my case, I'd teach her different. Do you know what Mr. Garnsey said to me about this matter?"

"I know what he said to me, the old scoundrel, and that's enough," answered Gorman. "It was as much as I could do to refrain from making him eat his villanous words."

"I do not see that there need be any villany going,"

answered Mr. Muir. "All she needs, to my mind, is a little persuading. Once she was married to you, she'd be glad enough you had persuaded her."

Gorman turned and looked steadily at his father.

"Were I in your shoes," went on Mr. Muir, without flinching from his son's gaze, "I'd just carry her off and make her your wife. Better-born and better-looking women than she is, and rich into the bargain, have been married the same way, over and over and over again, and settled down as happy with their husbands as if they'd gone to church with a troop of friends. There is no wrong in the notion. The girl likes you and would marry you if she wasn't too high to own her love. If you can't live without her—why, live with her. If the truth were known, I dare swear there is nothing she would like better than to be compelled to marry you. Some are that sort. They go on saying no, no, and no, all the time they are dying to say yes."

For a moment Gorman stood silent, then he asked,

"Are you aware you are urging me to commit a great crime?"

"Crime !" repeated Mr. Muir contemptuously ; "not a bit of it—no such thing !"

CHAPTER XL.

GIVEN the soil, no labourer need ever stand still for lack of evil seed to cast into the ground. Just as in a waste piece of land there is scarcely a weed which may not be found flourishing and taking all virtue out of the earth, so when temptation finds a waste corner in a man's soul lying fallow it immediately sets to work to fill it chokeful with nettles and docks and thistles, not to speak of meaner plants ; whilst over all the worse than useless vegetation it throws a glamour of beauty in the shape of wild convolvulus, which as it spreads kills everything tender and of fair repute—wholesome to the mind, beneficial to the soul.

It chanced thus with Gorman Muir. He knew—none better—that an enemy was planting tares in a field where luxuriant wheat should have been springing. He knew full well he had entered the service of that master who exacts such cruel labour, and, spite of all his promises, returns such wretched wages. He knew he was going as hopelessly wrong as a human being can go ; there was nothing about his state he did not know. Yet he did not stretch out a hand to pluck up the weeds which were springing so fast. He said it was Fate. Day by day he accepted more fully the doctrine of predestination, he exaggerated his own helplessness ; a mere reed shaken by the wind, he overrated the strength of circumstances, he talked to himself concerning “ destiny ” as though he had no power to arrest or mould his own.

With vehement anger he at first combated his father's suggestion ; but by degrees, and not slow degrees either, the idea became familiar to him. Seed ! Why, the birds of the air seemed to drop it as they flew. No one allowed him even to

try to forget Berna Boyle. His boon companions made a standing jest of the great repulse he had received. Even when no word was spoken, he felt people were thinking of the girl who would have nothing to do with him. Wherever and whenever he met Mr. Garnsey, that gentleman had a joke or a jeer ready for the occasion.

"How is *she*?" he would ask, in a confidential whisper; "any sign of a thaw yet? No! What a long and bitter frost!" "You don't want to speak on the subject." "My good soul, people may as well gossip before your face as behind your back." "Why don't you leave the country—it is simple madness for you to stop here? but if you must stop, don't go on exhibiting yourself in the character of a disconsolate lover. There is nothing women despise so much." "You ought to have refused to take her 'No,' which, by the way, I daresay she meant you to read as 'Yes.'" "What, still mooning about with your heart on your sleeve! Hide it, man, hide it; all the daws of the parish are pecking the poor little thing!" "Haven't you managed yet to drown that rascal Cupid in champagne? It does require an enormous sea to cover so small a body." "Cheer up, Muir, cheer up. The day must come when you will thank God the lady was obdurate." "I am beginning to believe now we were all mistaken, and that your unfortunate attachment was for the mother. If it had been for the unsophisticated daughter, I am sure you might have won her long ago." "You don't know how to make love, Mr. Gorman, and that is a fact. Come to school with me, and I'll soon teach you how to snare your bird."

As for Bell, her remarks fell on Gorman's heart like acid on a sore. She took a practical and prosaic view of the position. To her Miss Boyle was no angel, heroine, or damsel of romance. "She is nothing to make a song about," said Bell. "What you ever saw in her gets over me. I wonder to see you going about as you do. You mind me of a sulky child sitting with its finger in its mouth because it is denied something would hurt it. You've had a good miss of the girl, if

you could only think it. What do you want with a useless fine lady for your wife who hasn't two halfpenny pieces to rub together? Somebody who could bring some money in her hand, and know how to take care of it afterwards, would be far more fitting. If the old man hadn't brought you up with such notions, and taught you to behave yourself, it would have been 'telling' you and everybody belonging to you. I wouldn't let Miss Boyle have the satisfaction of thinking you're vexed; once she saw you not caring, laughing and talking, and sticking to your work, it would be her turn to feel sick and sorry. She'll never repent not taking you but once, and that will be always. The day'll come, and before long, when she'll be sitting fine and lonely, supping sorrow with the spoon of grief."

"Quit that," Gorman would answer, flinging out of the room.

He was fast growing desperate. Never a day passed without his father dropping some word which bore reference to how "easily the thing might be done."

"Anybody would think Scotland was America, and the Channel wider than the Atlantic. Why, you could get her out for a pleasant sail, and be married and back again before the mother missed her."

"A likely thing she would go pleasuring with me when she won't even speak when we meet!" retorted Gorman.

"Well, well, if you are so faint-hearted I can't help it. I only know, if it was my case, she'd have been Mrs. Muir long since. I wouldn't say a word if I didn't know she likes you. I wouldn't take any woman to wife against her wish."

"I tell you it is of no use trying to tempt me. I would not do her a wrong to be made a king."

"Who is talking of doing wrong? I am not. How can a man act fairer by a woman than marrying her?"

"You know she will not marry me."

"I think the matter might be put to her in such a way she'd be glad to marry you. However, take your own course.

I have told you what I should do ; but that is neither here nor there."

A man of Gorman Muir's temperament might have remained proof against these and suchlike suggestions had there been no traitor in the citadel of his own heart.

It was from himself, however, the real temptation came. He had enervated his moral sense by plunging into excess after excess, each one of which left his powers of resistance more weakened and shattered. Honestly he believed that in the deepest recesses of Berna's nature the fair sweet violets of a first love were blooming for him. He thought of the night when they met in the tender mysterious twilight—of the shy grace of her manner in those early interviews before he spoke of his affection ; he recalled her every word, the thrilling melody of her voice, the turn of her head, the fathomless blue of her eyes, the tell-tale blushes, the sweet lips, the soft curves of her young figure, and felt he could not resign her.

"I would make you so happy—so happy, my darling," he thought. "I would lead a new life. I would be worthy of you. O God ! if Thou wouldst only give me this one blessing, I would turn from the evil of my ways and sin no more."

It was a bitter struggle, and one for which he had not strength. He could not stand the siege. Any person might have been certain that unless he left the country he could never conquer the enemies marshalled against him. There were the foes encamped without ; but a worse foe was hidden within—imagination. In fancy he sketched the details of the flight across the sea ; he thought of all he should say to her—of all she might say to him. He would tell her how every fault he had committed was done for love of her. He would open his heart to her as he had never yet opened it. She would pardon ; she would yield. And then he roused himself from his fantasy, and looked out on the cold drear reality of his actual existence ; looked out, and, like one roused from some blissful dream, closed his eyes again, and strove—generally with success—to woo back the dear vision once more.

As suddenly as he rushed into dissipation he withdrew from it. Long solitary rides, walks across the hills, hours spent scudding before the wind, with the swish of the waves lulling his waking dreams—this is how he spent his days, while he told himself he was wrestling with temptation. And all the time he knew perfectly well he had taken the bantling to nurse, and that it was growing in strength and stature to a size he should not be able to crush. Fairy music was never sweeter than that borne to his ear on the gale. In the watches of the night he formed his plans; he dreamt his dreams; he was loved, happy, successful; and though the morning might dawn cold and gray, from behind the clouds the sun of fancy always came forth, warming the autumnal landscape, and bathing the whole earth with a glory which clothed the bare October fields in the verdure and freshness of May.

All this time he saw nothing of Berna. She had ceased attending church. He never met her in the village, but he knew she was better and at home; much alone there, also. Mrs. Boyle about that period spent her life in what Mrs. Pirn called one “continual gad.” None of her friends could complain of being neglected; like the little busy bee, she was here, there, and everywhere at once.

It seemed to her necessary to explain that Berna had stopped the marriage; but she refrained from stating how.

“I always knew she would do it,” said the widow. “She could not put up with the notion of a stepfather. Well, we’ll see if she likes teaching better. She has taken the fancy to demean herself that way. I have told her till I’m tired there never was a Vince a governess, or a companion, or anything unbecoming. I have implored her not to bring disgrace on us all by taking a situation. ‘If we’ve only a crust,’ I said, ‘let us share it, and don’t be breaking my heart going out tutoring, as if you had sprung from nothing.’ But there, what was the use of speaking at all? You might as well discourse to the wind as to Berna. She’s her father all over.”

CHAPTER XLI.

ONCE again Mrs. Boyle was absent from home. Miss Sheill, it is true, had left Bangor for Belfast ; but the Grays "having made up their minds" to "put up with the dulness for the sake of what they could save," the widow was good enough to cheer their loneliness by frequent visits, principally undertaken to see if she "couldn't light upon a house with plenty of room in it, suitable for letting to good families in the summer." Upon these occasions Mrs. Boyle never "took the road" empty-handed. A dozen or so of eggs, a pound of fresh butter, a fat hen, which "far more than paid the few mouthfuls she could manage to get down," were her contributions to the Gray larder. She never was more in earnest than when she stated her anxious desire to "get suited." She wanted to leave Clear Stream at once. "We've never had a day's luck since we went there," she said to Mrs. Gray ; "and we might fall in with a house we'd get for nothing, or next to nothing, here through the winter ; and I could be putting things right and getting straight before the fine weather comes." This was Mrs. Boyle's ostensible reason for wishing to get "clean away" from Clear Stream ; but Berna knew what her mother desired was to secure the furniture sent there by Mr. Vince.

"I would not put it past him," she observed to Ruth, "to say I must leave every stick there is in the house ; and though the whole lot wouldn't fetch four pounds, there's many a thing would be useful to me and 'Tilda Sheill. You'll come along with us, won't you, Ruth ? Though you're not 'fit for hard work you could dust, and answer the door, and see no waste was going on ; and we'd never miss your bite and sup. What do you think ?"

Ruth smiled a shrewd mournful smile as she answered,

"I'll go with you, mistress, if you want me. Though I am not so young as I was once, there is a power of outcome in me still; and, supposing you were taken ill, I think you would like better one you know beside your bed than another that might be a stranger."

"Ill!" repeated Mrs. Boyle. "Who's going to be ill? Not me! I've the best of constitutions, and there's never been a serious thing the matter with me since I had scarlet fever, when I was five years of age."

Ruth smiled again. She remembered that attack of scarlet fever, and the number of "teens" to which Mrs. Boyle had then attained.

"And with all my heart," she said, "I hope, mem, you'll keep your health, and be long as well as you're now."

"What would hinder me keeping my health?" asked Mrs. Boyle pettishly; "and I'm sure for spirit you might search Ireland over and not find my equal. Many a one would have been broken-hearted at the treatment I've met with; but you can't say you ever saw me sitting down and making a moan."

"You've held up wonderful," agreed Ruth submissively.

"I never was one to lie down and let people trample over me. I mind well what my poor father used to say, 'Care killed the cat;' and what's the use of fretting? 'A pound of grief won't pay an ounce of debt.' Look at Berna, now; she'll be an old woman before she's a young one. Dull! Ditch-water is lively to her! And the ways she has got, and the notions! Fancy her bringing disgrace on us all by going as companion to an old sailor's widow! Ha, you'd never in my youngest days have seen me doing the like of that now, Ruth, would you?"

"You're right there, mem," agreed Ruth; "nobody wise could ever have evened it to you that you would have accompanied the wife of an Admiral; but I am not so sure, mistress, it is altogether so bad a notion for Miss Berna. You see she isn't like you; she prefers quiet, and a settled way of living,

and as, you have often told me, she has nothing to look to when you are gone, it's maybe best she should begin to earn her bread now."

"I never heard the match of you, Ruth, never! Anybody listening to you and not seeing me would think I was an old withered woman; I only wish Berna may have as good a chance of living as I have. Many a time I feel as if I'd bury her; and perhaps it would be just as well, for what she'd do without me it is beyond my imagination to conceive."

"I don't know, I am sure," said Ruth reflectively; "she's a fond creature, and would miss you sore."

"But she's not going to have to miss me," declared Mrs. Boyle.

"I hope not, mem. Lord give you length of days, and health to enjoy them; but there's nothing surer than that we must all die some time."

"Many a one has lived to five times my age," went on the widow, who felt that such perennial youth as hers ought to prove an exception even to the universal rule.

"So I have heard," answered Ruth, thinking of the Patriarchs.

"I do consider it is very hard upon me," said Mrs. Boyle, "to have a child so headstrong and obstinate about her own way as Berna; but I suppose it's my fault, always giving in to her from the time she was an infant in arms. Ah! I was always too quiet and easy. What the Boyles needed among them was a termagant instead of a young soft creature, tender as a kid, and meek as Moses. But there! what's the good of looking back and crying over spilt milk that an Atlantic Ocean full of tears couldn't put back in the jug? To my notion, it's best always to be gay and lightsome. As my father used to remark, 'You'll be merry, Milly, when you're as old as Methuselah.'"

"And he'd a way himself of smiling back at Trouble, no matter how black she frowned," replied Ruth, who had her own reasons for trying to keep Mrs. Boyle in good humour.

"Ah, where would you find his like?"

"I can't tell, mem. I never met with one of the same before or since—I have got as much in this bag now as it will hold, I think. Will I fill the other, or—"

"I'll only need the one, Ruth. It's not my intention to stop away more nor a week at the outside. Berna'll want all the help I can give her, if she's to go decent to Newry. Have I my bonnet on straight?"

"It couldn't be better, mem. It sets you beautiful."

"Though it's black, and black never did become me like colours. But of all the mercies, Ruth, it is to be rid of that heavy crape veil that weighed on me like a mountain! Berna would have been pleased had I gone on disguising myself in it for ever. It's all very well for her now, but when she comes to be—that is, if she ever gets married—a desolate widow, she'll know the odds, and that widows need all the enlivening they can get if they're to live their lives at all. Do you mind Mrs. M'Cann, Ruth, and the way she went on about her first husband till she passed all chance of getting a second? Many's the time I've laughed to myself thinking about her."

And, thinking about Mrs. M'Cann, Mrs. Boyle laughed once more. Indeed, the remarkable contrast between herself and that lady so tickled her that she bade good-bye to Berna in the sunniest of moods, and all the way to the station talked to Ruth with a tempered equality which should have proved most gratifying to any one possessed of a well-regulated mind.

Mrs. Boyle's discourse might have induced any stranger to believe all her halcyon hours were spent before she ever met Ulick Boyle.

The shilling she in those days wrested from the reluctant pockets of Samuel Vince and exchanged for Kitty Linden's raspberry-puffs, and white muslins and sashes wherewith to entrap youths sillier than any bird, might, judging from her talk, have been thousands of golden guineas. The giggling girls, the shy and awkward suitors of her earlier life, she referred to with rapturous delight.

"It was my foolish marriage damped me," she declared. "O dear, a dear! and didn't I think myself the made woman when I got Ulick Boyle! Little I deemed the life was before me. He never could bear me look at a man, let alone speak to one. I had better have gone into a convent at once. And then to leave me without a shilling on which to enjoy my widowhood! Berna's as like him as two peas. She's all against the notion of a lodging-house. She wants me to try and live, or rather try and starve, on sixty pounds a year, if ever you heard the like. I wonder she doesn't take shame to herself, remembering that's all I've got. And she says she'll give me the most of what she can earn, as if I'd have it off her; besides which she'll be out of place more than half her time. As I tell her often, 'If you can't agree with *me*, how do you expect strangers will put up with you?'"

Over all these utterances Ruth pondered as she wended her way back to Clear Stream. "Likely it is just as well the mistress has got the fancy for taking a house. Between us, Miss Sheill and me might manage to please the lodgers, and there would be always a roof for Miss Berna to creep under. The poor master! if he only knew his child had to earn her bread!"

"I feel very content, nurse," answered the girl, when Ruth said something in the way of lamentation to her. "I try hard to please mamma, but, you see, I fail completely. She will be happier without me, and I shall be better away. I wish I could like her friends, but I cannot."

"I don't wish you could do anything of the sort, dear. They are not fit for you to associate with. They are very well in their way, but not your way. Now, if you tell me what your dresses want doing to, I can get through a heap of work while the mistress is away. She is going to stop at Bangor for a week."

Five days of that week slipped rapidly by. Berna and her nurse sewed diligently, and at length every article was ready, and most of her boxes packed. On Saturday evening, after

she had finished tea, the girl sat beside the fire, looking, by the light of one candle, over the few treasures she possessed.

They were contained in a miniature trunk, covered in morocco leather, and ornamented with brass plates, and comprised, besides some jewelry of trifling value, two or three books, letters from the Dowager and Ulick Boyle, and a packet of papers tied together with a piece of black ribbon. These Berna laid aside, while she burnt, without re-reading, all her kinswoman's correspondence. Thoughtfully she watched the last sheet of paper ignite, flare fiercely, and finally die out. Then, one by one, she lingered over the lines traced by a hand long cold. There was an indescribable tenderness even in the way she touched the paper—a pathetic sadness in her young face.

The whole past seemed brought by a mighty wave and laid at her feet. Events half forgotten—sorrows, hopes, pleasures, fears—were strewed around, borne from the wreck of her early life, and scattered in mournful disorder on the lonely shore of her troubled heart; playful allusions which once provoked smiles were now read through a mist of tears; pet names, loving words, gentle advice, devoted attachment, a faith in her which was beyond expression, the clinging to the one thing in life that had power to soothe a bruised and broken in spirit, came back as from the dead.

Reverently the girl laid the letters on the fire, and as the last blackened morsel fluttered up the chimney she covered her face and wept.

There is nothing in life so hard to bear as a joy which has turned to pain. But Berna, sitting solitary, felt there was no bitterness in her pain; she had not a thought connected with her father save what was good and beautiful. He had been foolish, and he bore his punishment like a man. The fault was his own, and he never blamed the wife he married for utterly failing to make him happy.

"I cannot bear the trouble as he did," thought the poor girl. "O mother, I wish I could!" and she cried on till some

of the sorrow was drained from her soul, and the passion of regret for her father's lost life had spent itself in tears.

The wind was moaning and muttering round the house ; at intervals heavy rain pelted against the windows ; the house was utterly silent ; not a sound broke the stillness which reigned within. Never before had Berna felt so desolate as when she took up the last packet of papers and untied the string.

They were letters—manuscripts, rather—from Gorman Muir. She began to read them, but was forced to abandon the attempt ; her blinded eyes refused their office, her heart grew sick and faint, as she thought of the man she loved with all her strength, yet had resolved never to marry. “Never, never, never !” she said, rising and dropping the papers into the glowing turf fire, the heat of which was no fiercer than the raging flame which sometimes burnt with such fury in Gorman's breast.

She stretched forth her hand to rescue one of the letters, but drew it back again.

“No ; they shall all go,” she murmured ; and she stood silent while the passionate words, illumined for a moment by the flames, shrivelled to powder and were gone.

At that moment a loud single knock resounded through the quiet house. It was rare for any one to come to Clear Stream Cottage, especially after dark ; and Berna, startled, opened the sitting-room door, while Ruth went to see who the late comer might be.

“It is a note for you, Miss Berna,” she said. “Step inside,” she added to the messenger ; who, stepping in as requested, stood in the hall, a long whip in one hand and his hat in the other.

“We're going to have a rough night, I'm afeard,” he observed to Ruth.

“It looks like it,” she answered. “You're gey and wet.”

“I am that,” answered the man ; “and the dumb beast's worse.”

“Ruth, Ruth !” cried Berna, “this note is from Mr. Gray.

Mamma has met with an accident. I must go to her at once."

"Not at this time of the night, surely, miss?"

"Yes, Mr. Gray says they hope it will not much signify; but my mother wants me, and he has sent a covered car over. Fetch my bonnet and shawl, nurse. I'll be ready in a moment," she added, turning to the driver. "Do you know how mamma met with the accident?"

"No, miss, I do not. The gentleman only gave me that note, and told me to make all the haste I could with it. He knows me well; I've driven him often. He said you'd likely come back with me."

"Will your horse be fit to return at once? He must be very tired."

"Tired is it, miss? He doesn't know what tiredness is. I'd like to hear him telling me he was tired. Up hill and down dale, it's all one to him. He's not so extraordinarily fast, but he's sure; he can do his forty mile a day and never put himself out."

"I won't keep you a moment, then," said Berna.

"I'd best go with you, miss," suggested Ruth.

"There's lashins of room, but I don't believe that they'll be expecting two of you," said the driver.

"I'll just put on my other gown and change my shoes, and give my face a rub," persisted Ruth.

"You'd better not come," interrupted Berna; "it might be inconvenient; and, besides, I should like you to stop here and have everything comfortable, in case I am able to get mamma home."

"I can take you both, and welcome, if you think they'll be best pleased to see you," said the man.

"No; I shall go alone," decided Berna, wrapping a shawl round her, and opening the hall-door. "Good-bye, Ruth; light a fire in mamma's room. If I should want you, I will send over in the morning. Now we can start," she said to the

driver; and, followed by the man, she hurried out into the darkness.

Seized with a sudden panic, however, Ruth rushed into the kitchen, snatched a cloak, and ran after her young mistress.

"Miss Berna, Miss Berna dear, for any sake, wait a minute! I'll go with you just as I am," she cried; but the wind beat back the words in her face. "Miss Berna," she panted, "wait a minute! Don't go off in the dark by yourself. I'm close behind you, darling;" and struggling with the latch of the gate, she reached the lane just in time to hear the driver shout to his horse and the animal start off at a pace which rendered all her efforts to overtake the car unavailing.

CHAPTER XLII.

IT was a night without moon or star. The wind, high all day, had increased in strength as the darkness deepened, and though its full violence could not be felt in the valley, the moment the car turned up the hill and began to get a little into the open it was met by furious blasts, which occasionally brought the horse to a standstill. The higher they climbed the worse became the weather. Up from the wild sea, where white horses were tossing their billowy manes and running mad races across the Lough, to Craigantlet; over the sparsely inhabited country which stretches thence to Bangor and Donaghadee, the storm came rushing. Then, after pausing one moment on the hill-top as if to take breath, it swooped down past Sunnyside and Ardilaw, strewing the ground with twigs, and wrestling with the old trees that had seen so many days of summer, and survived such awful winter weather.

At first, entirely absorbed in imagining what could be the matter with her mother, and wondering how she would find her, Berna did not pay much heed to the war raging around; but when the low land was left behind, and the shelter afforded by the woods around Ardilaw passed, she could close her ears no longer to the noise of the rising tempest, and in the darkness she sat in one corner of the car and shivered.

The very angel of destruction might have been riding in his chariot of cloud and storm over the land that night. The wind rushing down the hill-side struck with thuds against the car, in the same way wherewith giant, though invisible, hands might have dealt it successive blows. More than once the panting horse was drawn sideways across the road, in which position he could halt better than seemed possible with his nose in the teeth of the wind; but at last even this resource

was abandoned. The driver himself got down, and, taking the creature's head, laboriously led him, by means of a toilsome zigzag, to the crest of the ascent.

At that point the gale seemed as if it must rend the travellers. A gust took the conveyance as if with the fixed intention of dashing it to pieces. For a moment Berna "lost her head," and stretched forth her hand to open the door, meaning to spring out.

Before she could do this, the blast had swept down the hill, the driver was in his seat again, lashing on his horse, and they were spinning towards the sea at a pace that defied the storm, and meeting swept through it. They went down that hill at a gallop which made Berna hold her breath.

"We cannot be long now," she thought, "before we reach Bangor;" but she did not know the lie of the land well; and, what was more to the purpose, she had only the vaguest idea where they were going. On, and still on, a horse three parts bred tearing through the night at the very top of his speed, the car rocking and reeling as they sped along—the tempest roaring, the salt spray, borne inland on its pinions, stinging the driver's face—a deluge of rain pouring down upon the land! Such a night! such a night! In the midst of all her own hurry and trouble Berna found herself marvelling how it was faring with those at sea; and with her prayers for her own parent there mingled supplications that God would be gracious to those maids and mothers and children who, like Ruth when Ruth was young, had a man that night out in the darkness—out amid the storm—out on the cruel, treacherous sea, battling for his life.

The girl did not know in the least where the house lay at which her mother was staying; yet it seemed to her that a long, long time was consumed in getting to it.

The night, the storm, the hurry, the darkness, the fright, of course made the way seem both wearier and drearier. Still, an immense amount of ground seemed to have been covered since Clear Stream Cottage was left behind.

Once again they were on low ground, bowling along the level as merrily as the wind and rain would permit. It was a night when a man could scarce have heard himself speak, even had his good lot been cast well inland. But they were now nearing the coast. Berna, standing up and craning her head out of the most detestable conveyance the misapplied ingenuity of man ever invented, could hear afar off the frantic swish-swish of the sea on a rocky coast.

But still they were above the sound, which fact puzzled Berna.

"Surely we cannot be far from the Grays now," decided Berna; and then her driver took a swift turn to the left. She could not see; how the man could see baffled her; the car had no lamps; there was not a light visible on one hand or another, before or behind; the man was driving carefully, with the sea-spray dashing against the windows, the wind screaming and howling, the darkness deepening.

Once more the driver descended, and led his horse cautiously, first down an incline and then along a roughly gravelled road beside the raging sea. She knew nothing of where they were going, and strained her eyes, in vain, to see. Suddenly the man pulled up, the door was opened, a voice said, "Now, if you please, miss." A blaze of ruddy light fell across the darkness.

"How is my—" began Berna, and then she paused, amazed. Even her dazzled eyes could see the house was a mere fisherman's hut, and that Gorman Muir was standing on the threshold.

"Come in, come in," he said, stretching out his hands as he spoke; "your mother is much better."

Even then she did not understand. Almost without casting a glance to right or left, chilled, numbed, worn out, unsuspecting, she crossed the threshold.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"I will tell you in a moment," Gorman answered, closing the door and shutting out the howling wind and the driving rain.

By the dull red glow of a turf fire Berna could see he was strangely pale. The rich brown of his complexion seemed to have faded to a ghastly white—even his lips were white.

"You are not keeping anything from me?" she asked.
"My mother is not dead?"

She was filled with the idea that her mother had been carried to the nearest shelter, and that she lay close at hand.

"No, no," he replied. "I told you she was better."

"Where is she? In there?" and Berna pointed to a door leading to the only other room the cabin boasted.

"No, not there."

Then for the first time a doubt crossed the girl's mind. She did not pause to define it. She only looked around—at the earthen floor, at the bare white walls, lit but by the fire-light, at the utter absence of all sign of occupation—before she asked,

"Where is she, and why are you here?"

"I will explain. Let me first light a candle."

Though a vague dread was stirring at her heart, she stood patiently while he did so, with a hand which trembled to such an extent he could scarcely hold the match.

"Miss Boyle," he said, "will you forgive me?"

"What have I to forgive?" she inquired.

"The deception that has been practised upon you."

It seemed to Berna that her very heart ceased beating, yet she found voice to repeat,

"Practised on me?"

"Yes. Your mother, so far as I know, has met with no accident, and is perfectly well. You are now at Groomspout, not Bangor."

"Go on," said Berna, as he paused and hesitated. She was but a girl—only a weak, slight girl, who had not yet seen nineteen golden summers; nevertheless, there was a power about her, the while she stood expectant, one hand laid flat on the rough deal table, the other hanging by her side.

"I am waiting, Mr. Muir," she observed, "for your explanation."

"You shall have it," he exclaimed impetuously, making a step towards her.

She did not move, she did not raise a finger; but there was that in her face which arrested his intention of clasping her to his heart.

"I cannot go on as I have been doing," he cried; and at the sound of the fierce passion in his voice Berna inwardly quailed. "I can't live without you, and I won't; you must marry me. If this cursed tempest had not upset all my plans, we should have been on our way to Scotland ere now, and man and wife by to-morrow morning."

"Mr. Muir, you are mad," she answered.

"Am I? Then it is you have driven me mad. Till I saw you I was sane as most people."

Just for a moment the firelight wavered and flickered before the girl's eyes—under her feet the ground did not seem quite steady; then, taking her fear boldly by the throat, she said,

"I cannot stop here any longer. If you are sure there is nothing the matter with my mother, I will go home at once."

"You shall never return home except as my wife."

"I will never be your wife!" She had drawn the sword and thrown away the scabbard, and at last he knew she stood at bay.

"That was all very well once, my darling," he retorted, "but things have changed a little now."

"I have not changed," she said. "No power on earth could induce me to be your wife."

"Ah, you say that, dearest."

She did not answer in words; she only moved across the floor steadily, as she might have done had that rude hut been Boyle Court, and the hard bare ground under her feet softest pile, shot back the lock, lifted the latch, and stepped into the howling night.

With an angry smile Gorman watched this proceeding ; then, just as she crossed the threshold, he sprang forward, caught the girl in his arms, and drew her back within the cabin, a wild storm of rain pouring after them through the open door, while a sweeping blast of the mad hurricane extinguished the candle and sent the feathery white turf-dust flying in all directions.

For a moment he could feel her straining like a dog in a leash ; then he released her, while, with an effort of strength, he closed the door, shutting out the wind and the wet and the driving spray. He turned the clumsy key in the wards, and drew it from the lock, ere he spoke again to Berna.

Could she have uttered a prayer at that moment, it had been that the howling tempest might beat in the barrier which intervened between herself and liberty.

"Put all ideas of that sort out of your mind," Gorman said, with a grim hardness which, for the first time in all her knowledge of him, reminded Berna of his father. "You shall not leave this house except to step into a vessel which is riding at safe anchorage close by here. When the storm lulls we will go to Scotland, where we can be married at once. There has been fooling enough ; it is time all that was ended."

She did not speak ; she only looked despairingly around ; for a moment her glance rested on the fire.

"I know what you are thinking of," he scoffed ; "but there is nothing here that will burn."

"No, there is nothing here that will burn, or I would set the place on fire."

"Only to get away from me !" he cried. "Berna, Berna ! my love, my life ! how hard you are to win, yet what a jewel you will be to wear !"

"Do not call me Berna, sir !"

"Only tell me how to woo you"—and his face grew soft and his tone caressing—"and I will be your slave, your servant."

She took not the slightest notice of what he said ; she only

resumed her old position by the table—thinking, thinking, thinking—her eyes averted from Gorman, her whole attitude that of determined defiance.

For a time he stood looking at her—looking at the fair face, the firm sweet mouth, the wet disorder of her hair, the deadly pallor of her cheeks—and all the evil and all the good of his nature stirred within him.

“Berna,” he began, in a tone which seemed like a soft caress.

She lifted her eyes, and they flashed as she answered,

“I have asked you before, Mr. Muir, not to call me by my Christian name.”

“By what name should a man call his wife?” he retorted, stung by the scorn in her voice.

“I am not your wife.”

“I look upon you as my wife.”

“I will never be your wife, never!”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because no man can compel a woman to marry him. You have the power to kill me; but there is no power which could make me marry you.”

“Ah, you will think differently about that matter ere long;” and he laughed as one might laugh at the perversity of a child.

“Why should I think differently of it?”

“Do you really wish me to tell you—really?”

“Certainly I do.”

He paused a moment before answering—paused as if searching about for an unobjectionable form of explanation—while his eyes uneasily sought hers.

“Well,” she said, and her glance did not waver.

“There are some things—” he began slowly, and then stopped.

“There are some things,” she repeated, looking at him curiously.

Twice he opened his mouth to answer her, and twice the

words died away upon his lips; then, gathering together all his courage, he said desperately,

"There are some things the most innocent of your sex might be supposed to understand without telling. It is abhorrent to me to speak with such brutal plainness. However, if you must have it, you will marry me as soon as we can get to Scotland, because—you have been alone with me here."

There ensued a dead silence. Inside the hut the ticking of Gorman's watch was distinctly audible. Without, the storm raged and raved. The girl remained perfectly still; her cheeks were dyed crimson, and her shamed gaze was bent on the floor. He uttered no syllable. He was waiting to hear what she would say.

At last, after a pause, which seemed to him interminable, she asked, in a voice so low it was almost a whisper,

"You calculated on this?"

"Of course I did. Why otherwise should I have brought you here?"

"You thought I should be *glad* to marry you?" in a gradual, though not loud, *crescendo*.

"I believed you loved me; that it was only your pride and coyness stood between us; and that if once I could break down those barriers you would put your hand in mine and say, 'I will be yours for life.'"

"I see;" and there ensued another pause, during the continuance of which it might have been thought the gale had determined to strip the roof off the cabin. But Berna did not hear it. In her own heart there was a wilder tempest, in her own soul a more deadly fear, than that ever caused by the warring of external nature. She was struggling with an awful terror. She was striving to keep outwardly calm. She knew if once her courage failed she was lost.

"Mr. Muir," she began desperately, and her voice sounded strange even to herself.

"Call me Gorman, dearest," he tenderly suggested.

The words stung her to madness.

"How dare you," she asked, "insult me in this way? By a tissue of falsehoods, by means of a most scandalous deception you have brought me here; but you cannot keep me here for ever."

CHAPTER XLIII.

GORMAN strode to the fire, and replenished it with a lavish supply of turf from a creel close at hand. Then he stood for a time utterly still, his head bent forward against the rude black mantelshelf.

After that pause, which seemed to his companion endless, he drew a long deep breath, and returned to the table with such a changed set expression on his face that he looked like a different person.

He had previously relit the candle, and the girl could see every feature in the countenance which had once so stirred her young fancy.

"If," he began, and even his mellow voice sounded strange in the listener's ears, "if to love a woman and tell her so is to insult her, you are right, and I have insulted you. In no other way is your accusation true. Will you not sit down? I want to speak to you in serious earnest;" and he placed a chair for Berna, which she rejected.

"Pardon me, then," he went on, "for sitting. I am very, very tired," and he flung himself on a stool at a little distance from where she stood. "I daresay I am a rough rude fellow. You have often thought me so" (Ah, had she?); "but I would not wrong you. If, after hearing what I have to say, you still wish to go home, I will take you back. I promise you faithfully. Don't cry, my poor darling;" for Berna, broken down at last, was weeping unrestrainedly. "Were you so much frightened of me as all that comes to? Berna, had you such small trust in a man who would die for you? What! must I not come near you? So be it. Your will is my law." And lifting the heavy shawl, which had fallen to the ground when

she covered her face with her hands, he laid it on the table and resumed his seat, and waited till the first vehemence of her sobs was over.

"At my age it may seem a strange thing to say I never loved any one till I saw you. It is absolutely true, however. You are my first love ; most likely you will be my last. Had I not believed, though, that you cared for me, I would never have persecuted you as I have done. I could have taken 'No' as bravely as any other man. The blow might have been hard, but I should have borne it. All through, however, I have felt that you loved me ; you love me at this minute—"

"I do not," she gasped.

"But you care for something else more," he proceeded, as though she had not spoken ; "something which forces you, against the will of your better self, to seem hard and cold. You are not hard or cold, though, really ; beneath the ice of pride your heart is throbbing warm and true. O love, if it were not so, I could not love you ! Some happy day the stream of your affection will break these wintry bonds, and, overflowing its banks, bless the arid desert of a life you, and you only, can change into a garden fair as that of Eden."

"Never !"

"You deceive yourself ; it is not in woman's flesh and blood to go on turning a deaf ear to such love as mine. And you do care for me. You cared for me that summer evening when we met in the twilight, with the soft grass under your feet, and heaven only above our heads. Why, I wonder, did a day ever come to destroy your first impression of me ! But it is not destroyed—no, not even now. It is not the man you dislike, it is my position ; were I Gorman Muir of Clonmellin or Mount Michael, you would come to me shyly and—"

"I would not. If you owned all the land between here and Ardilaw, I should still give you the same answer."

"Perhaps so. I do not suppose you value money as you

do rank. You are a strange girl; yet I think I understand you. Just as a man may love honour more than a woman, so you love the something which is an integral part of your nature more than a man you would have married had you met him in the station and surrounded by the circumstances to which he was brought up. That is the difference between us. Do you suppose I should love you more if I saw you blazing with diamonds? In your plain sad gown you have ever seemed to me the fairest of women. O"—and he rose and paced the room—"if you could *but* love me more than the world and the things of the world; if you could forget I am the son of a farmer, and have to earn my bread, I should count myself richer and happier than any duke in the land! What single thing is there in this wide world I would not do for you?"

"There is but one thing you can do, and that is, open the door and let me go."

"I have said you shall go if you wish, but you cannot do so till the storm lulls a little. Few men could face such a night, and certainly no woman. You are safe here as if I were your father. Be content; I will take you home the first moment I can, if you bid me; and when I have said what I want to say, I will go and leave you in peace."

She pushed the long hair back from her tear-stained face, and looked at him.

"Yes, you may trust me," he answered. "Sweet, sweet eyes, that are wet because of my folly; tender mouth, that is quivering with sorrow; trembling lips, over which no kindly or loving word ever passed for me! Somehow I must have been but a poor, poor lover. A man should never be too much in earnest when a woman is in question; never be too humble; never let her know how completely she owns his heart. Had I loved you less, I might have made you love me a little. You are all alike. O, forgive me, dear; I scarcely know what I am saying. Your coldness and your pride have well-nigh turned my brain."

"You said you would do anything for me," cried Berna

reproachfully. "Won't you go, Mr. Muir? won't you leave me as you promised?"

"Yes, if it must be so—out into this howling night! Much you care what becomes of me! If you heard of my death, I believe you would piously thank Heaven."

She said nothing. She had nothing to say.

"Why do you drive me to desperation?" he asked. "Why is it I cannot hate you as I ought? Hard, icy heart! Supposing you have no love to give me, you might spare a little pity. There are women who can make even a refusal mournfully sweet; but you—you, from the moment you knew I was only the son of Hewson Muir, you looked more graciously on a beggar sitting by the wayside than on me."

It was true. She could not controvert his statement, neither could she argue with him, and say she was right. Remembering her own mother, how was it competent for her to speak to him concerning the shortcomings of his father?

"Be just, though," he entreated, eagerly pushing the advantage he thought he had gained. "Grant that my father is not a gentleman, that my sisters are not ladies, what then?"

For a moment her eyes sank under his. If he said her mother was not a gentlewoman either, what answer could she make? But he did not say that. In the fiercest hour of his pain and passion Gorman Muir could not have tried Berna's loyal heart by speaking concerning the trouble of her young life.

"I grant it all," he continued. "Do you suppose I am blind or deaf? Do you imagine it was nothing to come back, as if from another world, and find my relations were made but of common clay? Did you ever think what it must have been to me to live at Ardilaw, amongst those whose ways were not my ways, with whom I had not a thought in common? Berna, be just to me. Before Heaven, I stayed on amongst my own people solely that I might be near you and win you, that I might be able to make money, and take my sweet bird away to some dainty nest where she could find peace. Not a plan

of my life but had you for its motive. From the time I first saw you, you have been in my thoughts by day and haunted my dreams by night. Make those thoughts realities, darling. End my long sorrow and waiting. Marry me, and, as I stand here, I will never give you cause to rue this black night's work. No, don't shrink from me! I won't kiss you till you say I may—till you say so without word! Marry me, and, if you like, I swear I will leave you, once we are man and wife, till your soul yearns over me, and you write 'Come!'

She was touched, but not shaken. She had gone over it all before hundreds of times. In the watches of the night her heart had pleaded for her lover, but her sense had decided against him. No matter how frequent the struggle, the result was always the same.

"I will not marry you," she said. "Let me return home."

"You *will* not marry me now?" he asked incredulously.

"I will not marry you, now or EVER!" she repeated.

"Then, my God, what is to become of us both?" cried Gorman. "Berna, Berna, you are talking wildly; you do not understand! How can I make you understand? My dearest, listen to me. It is not for myself now so much that I speak, but for you, my poor dear innocent darling. For Heaven's sake, listen to me, and don't be angry if I speak too plainly! See, I am trying to talk calmly. Don't look at me so reproachfully. I must say what I have to say to you. Till this night I have done you no harm. All the sorrow and hardship and suffering have been mine; but now I tell you fairly, sorrow and hardship and suffering will be yours if you do not marry me. I cannot tell what demon possessed me to entice you here. If we could stand where we were this morning, I would shoot myself rather than place you in the position I have done. But as it has been done, for God's sake, marry me. I know what the world will say. Your sex always believe the worst of one another. No one will ever credit things are only as they are. Marry me, and I will spend my life in trying to make you amends for the evil I have wrought. Marry me,

darling, and we will go away and begin a fresh life in a fresh place—a new beautiful life in some fair land beyond the sea.’

He was almost incoherent in his anguish and his entreaties. He flung himself at her feet on the earthen floor; he seized her hand and pressed his burning lips upon it; he prayed her by every memory in the past, by every hope of the future; he adjured her by everything a woman could hold dear; he lavished upon her every term of endearment his passionate nature could utter; and she only stood looking down at him with terrified eyes, which held no light of love in them.

Somehow, as he said himself, he had been a poor, poor lover. The player who stakes his all on a single throw more often than not rises a loser. A cool head and a cold hand make a sure hand. The game was not for Gorman Muir. He knew this while he was conjuring her, by all things in heaven and on earth, to give him the right to stand between her and the world—knew it before she said, in those soft tones which stabbed him like a knife,

“It is of no use. Even if all turn out as you say, I cannot marry you.”

“But think,” he persisted. “How could you bear to know your name was in every one’s mouth? We might be able to keep the matter quiet for a time, but it must leak out eventually.”

“I have committed no sin,” she answered.

“And I have, I suppose; yet it will be your fair fame that will be sullied—”

“Nothing but my own act can ever really do that,” she retorted. “What the world chooses to say I must bear; but if I were so false to myself as to marry you, I should have to endure the pangs of self-reproach as well as of misery.”

“I am, then, such a vile wretch that you think it impossible for me to win a woman’s love?” he asked, with scornful self-depreciation.

“You could never win mine now,” she answered, in a tone of the deepest sadness, “never!”

"And you will not let me have even the satisfaction of devoting my life to wiping out the error of this night?"

"No. I should prefer the worst people could say of me to marrying you."

He looked at her in surprise. At last he felt she was in earnest. "Well, then, there is nothing more to be done," he said, folding his arms across his chest, and looking the very incarnation of angry despair.

"Nothing, except to leave me free to go home."

"You cannot go home while this tempest is raging; but the moment it abates I will take you back. I promise you that on my honour. Do not smile so contemptuously. If I have erred, I shall repent my error through every day of my future life; and, besides, it was for you. How could any man think so beautiful a casket held only a heart of stone! I will leave you now, if you promise me not to attempt to leave this wretched shelter till I come for you."

She hesitated, and made no reply.

"Then I must remain here," he said. "I cannot have your death at my door. I entreat of you to promise me. If you will not be my wife, every moment I stay here may make matters worse for you hereafter."

"I promise, then," she answered reluctantly.

"I am going, heart of stone," he said, in accents of the most mournful reproach. "I do not wish that some day you may know from experience the anguish you have caused me. What a cursed fate," he added passionately, "that out of all the women on earth I should have given my love to you! But it is over. I will trample your memory underfoot; I will strive to forget your lovely face. There are women who lead men to destruction, and there are women who drive them to destruction. You are one of the latter; but I won't be destroyed by you—I swear it! You have spoiled my life so far; but you shall spoil it no longer. Before Heaven, as I stand looking at you now, I do not know whether to curse or to bless you."

She remained for a short while mute, regarding him with an expression which had something curious in its infinite sorrow. At length she asked,

"May I say something to you?"

"Say what you choose," he answered; "it will be nothing pleasant, I am sure."

"No, it is nothing pleasant," she agreed.

"Still, say on. I would rather hear you speak in anger than not hear you speak at all."

"You have repeated over and over again to-night that I loved you. Judge how true what I am going to tell you is, when I am not ashamed to say you were right. I loved you once. I do not mean I should ever have married you, but—"

He stretched out his arms towards her, with a passionate gesture, as he cried in rapture,

"You will love me again—"

"Never! Once love is killed, it can never grow again. The day mine died I knew it was my own ideal I had cared for; not you. O, no—no—no! not you!"

"Why do you taunt me in this way? After raising me high as Heaven, why do you cast me down into Hell?"

"I am not taunting you. It is the last thing I should think of doing. You have been very cruel to me. A lonely girl, without a human being to rest upon, you persecuted me, as you yourself said just now. *You* could have left *me*. *I* could not go away and leave *you*. You made my life bitter. You have to-day done me a wrong, the consequence of which you admit I can only faintly foreshadow; but I could forgive you all these things—"

"If there were not some one thing you cannot forgive. What is it?" he scoffed.

"I will tell you. I called one day, by appointment, to see a lady who lives on the Ormeau Road. She was out, but had left a message, and the servant, showing me up-stairs, asked me to wait for her. Almost opposite was a little roadside public-house, at which a car drew up. You and a girl, and

I suppose her brother, got off, and went into the public-house."

"I should like to hear the end of your story," said Gorman defiantly, as she paused. "That is not the finish, I conclude."

"No ; that is not the finish. After a time you all came out again ; the girl—O, she was so young and so pretty !—flushed and excited. She had lovely light-brown hair—I do not think she could have been more than sixteen ; and after you were seated, she put her arm round your neck, and laid her head on your shoulder. Her bonnet was tumbling off, and her brother knocked it on with a loud laugh ; and you—you laughed, and the driver laughed too ; and then the car drove off ; and I—I—I then knew you were not what you had seemed to me—what I had fancied you were."

A dull red wave of crimson blood surged up into Gorman's face, and stayed there. He could not speak ; he could not even look at Berna.

"I cried that night such tears as had never fallen from my eyes since the morning my father died," went on the girl. "I thought I never could forget the shame of having been told by a man like yourself that he loved me—*me!*—and I was so sorry for that poor young thing ; her face and her loose brown hair still haunt me in my dreams."

"Stop," said Gorman hoarsely ; "she is not one fit for you to speak of." And, without adding another word, he opened the door, and, passing out, stood bareheaded in the darkness, with the rain beating, and the spray whirling, and the wind shrieking—a man whose own acts condemned him.

Passing round the cabin, he entered a rude shed, in one corner of which a horse was tied up ; in another corner two men lay stretched on some straw, both of whom stirred as Gorman came in and securely fastened the latch. A lantern hanging upon a nail shed a weird light over the scene. Without speaking a word, Gorman turned a creel bottom upwards and sat down upon it, his face set, his head bent, his hands

loosely clasped between his knees. At last one of the men got up, and approached him.

"How does she take it, sorr?" he asked.

"What business is that of yours?"

"Faith! I'm thinking it'll maybe turn out the business of all of us."

"Hold your tongue!" commanded Gorman.

With a growl Sniff might have envied, Doey returned to his lair, while he watched his master through cunning half-closed eyes.

"I hope he mayn't have murdered the girl," he thought; "there's a power of evil in thon face."

The long, long night wore on, and still Gorman never moved, save now and again to open the door and look at the sky, still black as ink, across which the storm-fiends were riding amid a deluge of rain. Over the rocks close at hand the sea was spending its fury; the mad roar and din of the billows sounded awful in so lonely a place, amid the terrible desolation and murky darkness. For ever that night stood out in Gorman's memory—a night without a star of hope or ray of promise! Towards morning the wind dropped a little. Day dawned with sullen reluctance, as though loth to commence its work. The tide had ebbed so far it was almost at its turn, and the sea-horses, with their wild white manes, were rushing out into mid-channel. The rain was still pouring down in torrents, yet even that seemed to be slackening. The expanse of tossing billows and sad sea-shore was depressing to a degree; there was no sun to cheer and lighten the green slopes of Down. Not a living creature—man, child, dog, or bird—was to be seen, save Gorman himself. It might have been the last day of the world, and Gorman the last human being in it, as he stood looking seaward over the gray lough, where the waves were madly chasing each other, thinking of his wrecked life, of the wild sin he had attempted, but which he was not sinner enough to carry through to its bitter end. Behind him lay first a stretch of soft green turf soaked and soddened with wet,

and then some rising ground covered with emerald grass, which, when once wild flowers begin to spring, is dotted with stars and bells in unimaginable variety. There thyme yields its perfumes to each wandering breeze; there the heather and the gorse, and lovely weeds, and tiny strawberries, and trailing blackberry runners grow all together in exquisite disorder and tangled beauty.

The picturesque cabin no longer faces the sea; it alone has vanished; all else remains the same. In fine weather the old castle at Carrickfergus can be seen from the spot where Gorman stood; where the lough widens and merges in the Channel the bold line of the Gobbins is clearly visible; to the left lies the little harbour, where on that morning, now so far away, there rode at safe anchorage the yawl in which Gorman had insanely purposed to carry an unwilling girl to Scotland in order to make her his willing wife. There are still the rocks that have, since that awful night, been out amid the howling of the tempest and the din of the waves. It all looks fair and peaceful on a fine day in summer. There is a great charm of rest about the sunny slope, a sense of pleasant loneliness delightful to one who has lived pent up in cities; but on that gloomy winter's morning—smarting under the consciousness of loss, aching with remorseful memories of wrong—it seemed to Gorman Muir a spot accursed, a place whence content and happiness had fled, never to return.

Slowly he retraced his steps to the shed, where Doey was making a reluctant toilet by slipping his arms into a heavy pilot-coat.

"Put the horse in," commanded Gorman.

"In where?" asked Peter, astonished.

"Are you a fool? In the car, to be sure."

With a gesture of intense disgust, Mr. Doey flung off his over and under coats, and proceeded to obey instructions with the muttered commentary that "he hoped he mightn't be the only fool going that morning."

Whilst he was hooking on the traces, his master came and

stood beside him, regarding the rickety conveyance with a strange abstracted gaze.

"Where am I to take her this time?" asked Doey, referring to the car, not to Berna.

"Nowhere," was the reply.

"Faith, then, and it is a queer notion, harnessing the beast to stand out in this wet draughty hole! He might as well be in a bog."

"He's not going to stand; but I mean to drive him myself."

Mr. Doey, who was backing the horse, suspended this operation. "Master," he said, in a low whisper, though there was not a soul to hear, "you haven't murdered her, have you?"

Gorman laughed mirthlessly. "No," he said, "only perhaps because I did not feel tempted."

"Then what call have you for the car, sorr? what are you going to do with the lady?"

"What is that to you?"

"It may be a heap to me. I've run a serious risk over this business to please you, and it's my right to know now what is in your mind at this minute. If the weather moderates—and I'm not afraid but that it will—the wind is not so contrary but with a bit of tacking we might make Portpatrick easy before dark."

"I don't want to make Portpatrick. I intend to drive Miss Boyle back to the place she was brought from."

"My heavens! Are you mad?" exclaimed Doey. "No, Mr. Gorman, it's no use looking that way at me. I'm as good a man as yourself, though I haven't as much money to play at chuck with. Liberty's as sweet to me as putting a rope round your neck may be to you. I don't know what the sentence is for such a game as we started to play, but it's not long since it was a hanging job; and if you had not told me faithful she should never see Ireland more unless she saw it as your wife, I would have had nothing to do with the matter."

For answer, Gorman only seized the horse's head, and began leading him round to the front door of the cabin.

"Stop a minute, master; if you've done nothing more, you've sworn her, haven't you? Maybe you haven't a Testament handy; but there's a bap in my pocket: swear her on that; it's better nor nothing."

"You'd better stand clear," advised Gorman, in a tone which meant "Danger."

"At least, let me take the reins, sorr."

Gorman's eyes flashed. "You old scoundrel!" he cried. "Do you think I would trust her with you if there was a convenient quarry anywhere about?"

"I brought her to you safe enough from Ardilaw Hill," retorted Mr. Doey. "Well, well, have your own way of it, and see where it will land you. I wouldn't be standing in your shoes this minute for something. Mind, you must keep me clear; if there is law and justice in the land, you must keep me clear, and I'll expect to be well paid for the distress of my mind, over and above what I was to get anyway."

Gorman entered the hut, the bare misery of which the sad morning light brought into full relief. Berna was standing ready; she looked as if she had never sat down all night. The turf fire was now a mere heap of white feathery powder; the bare walls showed long stains of wet; through the blackened rafters the thatch was plainly visible. Gorman glanced remorsefully around. Here was a palace to which he had brought his queen, who answered his greeting with heavy eyes and pale cheeks, but spoke no impatient word, no sentence of reproach.

"How is it to be?" asked Gorman; "am I to take you back?"

She merely inclined her head in reply.

"You have thought it all over?"

"Yes."

"You have been hard upon me in your judgment."

She turned her head aside with a weary gesture, as she said,

"I will go now, Mr. Muir; I have only waited since dawn because I promised you that I would."

"O Berna! O my darling! can I never set the wrong I have done you right?"

She stopped on her way to the door. "Never mind about that," she murmured; "only—"

"Is it sin no more, you mean?" he asked bitterly.

She did not speak, but she looked at him. Through future years full of toil, trouble, and temptation, he carried the memory of that look like a talisman.

If the drive to Groomsport by night had seemed long, the return journey by day appeared endless. The horse was well-nigh spent before they got half-way to Craigantlet. Three times Gorman was forced to descend and lead it up the hill, encouraging the creature with cheery words as well as his sad heart would let him. Once the summit was gained they got on better. Down towards the valley, past Finney's Farm and Ardilaw, where the chimneys were smoking, and the indefatigable Bell already up, the car bowled rapidly; along the muddy lane they splashed and floundered. "If only now," thought Gorman, "we can reach Clear Stream without meeting any one, all may yet be well."

They did not meet a creature. They stopped at the gate. Gorman almost lifted the girl out, and they hurried together through the tiny shrubbery, and across the bridge and into the house, the door of which stood wide open.

Ruth met them in the hall; at the first sight of their worn faces she guessed almost how matters had fallen out.

"Don't speak a word, Miss Berna," she whispered; "the mistress came home last night not half an hour after you had gone. They've got a boy down with the smallpox at Mrs. Gray's, and all the arts of man wouldn't have kept your mother in the house once she knew it. She's been going on about you all night like a mad woman; but I have coaxed her to lie down, and made her a cup of tea, and she's asleep now. For any sake, Mr. Muir, don't be stopping here. I wouldn't for

untold money she woke and saw you. She's neither to hold nor to bind."

"I am going," said Gorman. "Good-bye, Miss Boyle;" and he was turning away without another word, when she stretched out her hand to him. "God bless you!" he added, pressing it in both of his; and then Berna and her nurse were alone, looking at each other in silence.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MRS. BOYLE was, indeed, neither to "hold nor to bind." Ruth had in nowise exaggerated that lady's mental condition. Her previous states of ceaseless restlessness and maundering imbecility might have been described as calmly wise when contrasted with the temper which had entered into possession of a chamber never thoroughly swept and garnished. What with dread of "losing her beauty," rage because Berna had "gone off with a vagabond, whose like for wickedness could not be found in the county," and fury because the young man had been so far "left to himself as to take up with a bit of a child"—the widow's ravings were maddening to hear.

"I hope you're satisfied now," she said to her daughter. "You'll be the talk of the town ; not a child playing itself in the gutter but will point a dirty finger after you. O dear ! was it for this I took the trouble of bringing you up respectable, never letting you hear a word but what was of the best, and setting you an example the Queen's own children, maybe, don't see before them ? If there's law, though, in Ireland, I'll be even with that rogue ; he's taken this way to be revenged on me because I'd have nothing to say to him. Here, get out of my way ; don't be standing there ma-ma-ing me, I'm sick of such falseness—looking as you could hardly bear the sight of a man coming to speak a pleasant word to me, and then taking the first opportunity of starting off with him, in the dead of the night, too ! Fine carryings-on, I'll be bound, there have been here with you and that old hypocrite Ruth ; and me so unsuspecting, I never gave a thought to any wrong-doing. Ah, it's true enough, still water flows deep ! There is no conception of the depth of you. I always did say nobody living

would ever be up to the cunning of Ulick Boyle, but you are craftier still."

"Will you let her alone, mem?" interposed that "old hypocrite" Ruth. "Trouble enough has come upon her, though none of her own making; and it would be more fitting if you were trying to comfort her at this minute instead of talking in the wild way you are doing."

"Things have come to a pretty pass, I am sure," exclaimed Mrs. Boyle, "when a lady born comes to be lectured by her own servant! I'll be glad if you'll suit yourself as soon as you can. I only hope you may get another mistress the masterpiece of goodness I have been to you."

"I am beholden to you, mem, for many and many's the kindness," answered Ruth, "and I have never said a word to the contrary; but I won't stand by and hear the child I nursed accused of doing things it never would have entered into her head to think about. As for leaving you till Miss Berna goes to Newry, that I won't do. After she is gone, you may get rid of me as soon as you like."

"If anybody had taken their Bible oath," declared Mrs. Boyle, "the day would come when you'd be willing to leave me, I'd have said they had no more sense than a calf, and we all know what a foolish, shambling sort of a creature a calf is; but it's well to be seen I am poor now and thought a nobody of among you. Wait a bit, though. Everything has a turn—even the salt sea; and maybe you'll be repenting yourself in sackcloth and ashes—sitting among the cinders like Job—when you see me rich and considered, and merry as it's my nature to be, and as I would be if it wasn't for the misery of my life. There never was a truer word said than that misfortunes never come single. I've had enough to break a bank. And as if all my past troubles were not enough, there's this scandal Berna has got herself into, that'll make us the sport of the county."

"If you would only keep it to yourself, mistress, the county need not be one bit the wiser."

"And let the Muirs have the say all their own way? No, thank you, Ruth; that may be your notion, but it's not mine. There is not a living soul but will be told how we've been served—a lone widow and a helpless child. What's that you're saying, Berna? You wish I would not mention that subject? Trust me! You ought to have considered how your sin would find you out before you got into such a scrape. Just lay my bonnet and shawl ready, Ruth. Though I'm hoarse with the cold, I'll lose not even one day before going to see Mr. McCurdy as to how we can pay them out. O, and indeed, it's he's the clever lawyer! A red-hot Orangeman; and yet they say there's nothing he delights in more than getting off a Roman. I don't think it's Christian myself to be willing, even for money, to do a good turn to the Pope's followers—still, Jew or Christian, there's not one like him in the North for knowledge and impudence. What are you ringing your hands for, girl? If you're so fond of Mr. Gorman Muir as all that comes to, you had better go after him again, and stop with him, though it does not seem as if he wanted you."

For once, Berna did speak strongly, but she might as well have spoken to the wind. Mrs. Boyle remained resolute.

"If you have no respect for yourself, I have respect for you," declared the widow. "I'm not a child to be taught, and I'll not be instructed by you. I'd just wish you to tell me what I'd say to your father hereafter when he comes up and asks me, 'How did it happen, Millicent' (he never was free and familiar like the way some men are), 'you let them as brought disgrace on my daughter off scot-free?' No; I'll do my duty by you, though you haven't done your duty by yourself. Where's there another mother, I wonder, would sacrifice herself to you as I am doing? I'll miss the train if I'm not smart. It's seven years that villain will get, if he gets a day."

"Never heed her, dear," said Ruth, as Mrs. Boyle left the room to array herself for the conquest of Mr. McCurdy and the destruction of Gorman Muir. "There's not an attorney but will tell the mistress the best thing she can do is to go

home and keep a quiet tongue in her head. What matter if she does go the round of the lawyers? They're all sworn to secrecy, like the priests; and maybe she'll be content when she understands there is nothing to be done, and nobody to do it."

If ever a man were driven well-nigh to distraction with the drivelling folly of a would-be client, Mr. McCurdy was that man.

During the whole of his legal experience he had never felt so thoroughly mystified. Advice he gave one moment he was forced to retract the next. No kaleidoscope could have shaken up the multiplicity of patterns the widow presented before him. He had a clear head, but it reeled with the mass of unconnected narrative to which he was forced to listen.

"Good heavens!" he cried at last, "I thought from what you said, to begin with, the girl was a mere child, and now I gather she is getting on for twenty years of age. Your best and wisest plan is to do nothing. It is one of those cases in which 'Least said the soonest mended.' If they like to marry, give them your blessing. I am sure I hope they will be happy. 'All's well that ends well,' you know. Now, you must really excuse me, I have clients to attend to. No; I'm sorry to appear rude to a lady, but I have already given you more than an hour of my time. Ross, show Mrs. Boyle out. Good-morning, ma'am; I am truly glad matters are no worse. They might have been, you know."

It was late before Mrs. Boyle returned home, dispirited, cold, faint, wet, miserable. She had during the course of the day received many hard knocks, the worst of all coming from "Tilda Sheill," who said, "There is not a thing wrong with Hughey Gray but chicken-pox, only Mrs. Gray didn't know how else to get rid of you civilly. She was in town to-day, and told me so herself," added this candid friend, who had begun to doubt the expediency of going shares with Mrs. Boyle even in a boarding-house for gentlemen.

"And if I was you," went on Miss Sheill, "and had a

daughter misbehaved herself, I would not go singing the story through the streets like a ballad. You'll only make a laughing-stock of yourself. People will be screaming to hear you thought the young man was after you till you found Berna had managed to catch him. You took us all in finely, but not near so well as you took in yourself. You never had much sense, Milly; but I scarce thought you would be so simple as to suppose a young man would make love to an old woman while a young one was near."

This was the cruellest cut of all. Mrs. Boyle held her to her guns, but Miss Sheill captured them one by one. She knew the widow's age to an hour, and she had no mercy. When Mrs. Boyle left this companion of her youth she felt that the world was very cruel, and she strangely lonely in it.

"Lay my things past, Berna," she said; "if I never want them again, they'll come in for you. I think I'll go to my bed, Ruth; as everybody remarked to-day, I'd no business to be out with such a cold on me. A drop of hot whey might take this weight off my chest. What's that you are saying, Berna dear? Wouldn't I like a basin of arrowroot? I would, well, if I could only swallow it; but I couldn't. My heart is in my mouth, and there is a lump in my throat as big as an egg. Yes; you may help me to bed if you wish. I've been wrking for you all day, and this is the end of it."

"I am afraid mamma must be very ill, Ruth," remarked Berna, later on in the same evening. "I don't know when she kissed me of her own free will before."

"She has got a bad cold on her, miss; she'll be herself again in the morning," answered Ruth, with unconscious irony.

CHAPTER XLV.

AT Clear Stream Cottage the dinner-table was laid after the peculiar fashion that found favour in Mrs. Boyle's eyes. She liked to take her meals as though life were either an eternal picnic or the commencement of a hurried journey, which necessitated food being swallowed standing and with loins girt.

There was nothing the widow loved better than a raid into the pantry, where "she could eat a mouthful of whatever was going." Next to this delightful proceeding she inclined to upsetting all usual arrangements.

For example, were tea the repast in progress, she immediately thought she should like a slice or two of ham, "as much as would lie on the blade of a knife;" and when Ruth added eggs she was wont to say, "The extravagant creature, it's well to be seen she hasn't to pay for all this," and then, under protest, eat what was set before her, "or else the good victuals will just be thrown out."

Ten days had passed since she was "laid by" with that cold contracted in looking after the interests of her "thankless daughter."

During that period she ordered her household by having her bedroom-door set wide, and screaming directions to Ruth along the passage; and when she got better she at once proceeded to find fault with everything which had been done during her illness.

"You're a fine useless pair," she declared, with scorching irony. "If it wasn't for me the house would soon go to wrack and ruin. You'd best make up a stew of that mutton-bone, Ruth, with plenty of potatoes; and O, but those potatoes are the take in, I'd every bit as soon eat soap; that'll be enough for two; as for me, I only want a cup of tea and a bite

of bread. If things go on as they are doing, I suppose I won't be able long to have even that. What's that you are saying, Berna—you'd like a cup of tea, too? Well, you are not going to have tea, miss; you'll eat and keep up your strength, and give people no cause to say you are breaking your heart because that good-for-nothing Gorman Muir won't have any say to you. I dare be sworn he thinks he is going to get off scot-free, but he will find out his mistake. He forgot he had me to deal with! Ruth, get the dinner as soon as ever you can. Yes, I wouldn't say but you are right, a poached egg might help to keep up my strength; I feel sinking for want of support."

This, then, was the composite meal spread in the only sitting-room Clear Stream Cottage boasted. The fare could not be considered other than plain, but Berna cared little for that. Had there only been quietness therewith, she would have welcomed a much drier morsel than that savoury stew Ruth had concocted from the mutton-bone.

Mrs. Boyle was in the act of pouring out a cup of tea, while Berna helped herself to a portion of the dish in which potatoes played a principal part, when a loud double knock caused the widow almost to drop the pot. "Mercy on us!" she exclaimed, "who can that be?"

"It's Mr. and Mrs. Vince," said Ruth, in a whisper, opening the sitting-room door. "They can wait a minute while I whip the dishes out."

"You'll do no such thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Boyle. "Let them see for themselves the way we have to live. Maybe it'll shame Richard. Don't stand there like a stock or a stone, but let them in;" which Ruth did.

"Well, Richard," said Mrs. Boyle, as that gentleman entered the hall; "so you've come at last to take a look at us! Better late nor never, you know. Come in, come in, both of you. We were having a morsel of dinner; beggar's dish, that your servants would turn up their noses at, is good enough for poor people like us."

"I am extremely fond of Irish stew," said Mrs. Vince good-naturedly.

"You're welcome to the whole of it, then. It makes me laugh to think of your eating such food. I can't help thinking of that man's ewe lamb in the Bible."

"Stew is not exactly your ewe lamb, Mrs. Boyle, is it?" asked Mrs. Vince. "We have come to talk about this ewe lamb, though," she added kindly, laying her hand on Berna's shoulder. "My poor child, what is all this story about Mr. Muir?"

"Ah, what, indeed! She may well be afraid to look you in the face. As if I hadn't trouble enough before, she must bring this disgrace upon me. She'll tell you nothing. She's as secret as the grave; but I am not going to hold my tongue, she may be very sure of that."

"It seems to me a great pity, Mrs. Boyle," said Richard Charles, "that you have not, as you express the matter, 'held your tongue.' A great scandal might, with the exercise of a little prudence, have been averted."

"I suppose you'll tell me next it was my fault Gorman Muir cajoled her into going off with him."

"I am sorry to hear such a version of the affair. I understood the grossest deception was practised upon your daughter."

"So it was, the worst of deception. I'll tell you in a minute what the double-faced wretch did," declared Mrs. Boyle, proceeding immediately, and at great length, to explain Gorman's wickedness, Berna's slyness, and her own manifold perfections. Once or twice Mr. Vince shook his head in impatient deprecation of the widow's volubility. No one could edge in a word whilst the stream of her eloquence flowed glibly on. Even Mrs. Vince was unable to stem the torrent, and sat listening in dumb amaze to the utter folly of the widow's talk.

As for Richard Charles, he held his hat in his left hand, occasionally smoothing the nap with his right, in order to soothe a perturbation of mind incapable of removal. That

day the world seemed very black to Mr. Vince—the glories of Craigvallen, the satisfactory state of his banking account, the high respect with which many—very many—persons regarded him, the presence of Marcella, daughter of etcetera, failed to restore his equanimity.

Mrs. Boyle sat in the only armchair the apartment contained; Berna had taken possession of a stool close beside the hearth, her head resting against the black marble mantelpiece, her eyes cast down, her cheeks white, her hands listlessly crossed in her lap, appealing to no one by word or glance, yet hearing perforce her mother's diatribe and also the words of wisdom which, like pearls in the old fairy tale, dropped with slow and measured fall from Mr. Vince's lips.

It was with no goodwill of his own Richard Charles had driven out to Clear Stream, but he could not wash his hands of Mrs. Boyle and Berna unless he quarrelled with his wife. The seed sown by his cousin had grown apace. While she was still complaining about her head "being stuffed up" and her windpipe closed, to say nothing of a lump in her throat "like an apple," and a "rawness across her chest" that made her "fit to scream every time she drew a breath," the evil crop was springing and ripening. All sorts and conditions of men and women had heard something of the tale—a paragraph had crept into the local papers, which, before Mr. Vince's "attention was called to it," blossomed out into quite a sensational narrative.

Then, indeed, there ensued a bitter time for Richard Charles. Some enemy discoursed, at the length of about a column, on Miss Boyle's position and antecedents. Boyle Court figured in the story, as well as all the Boyles who had ever owned that property; while, on the other side of the house, Berna was described as closely connected with our distinguished townsman, Richard C. Vince, Esq., of Craigvallen; Ulick Boyle's unfortunate marriage, which was stated to have been "romantic," the writer referred to with a covert insolence that stung Richard Charles to the quick; not to

mention that Mr. Samuel Vince (a once well-known character) was dug up to do duty as grandfather in the exciting tale.

Mr. Vince almost ground his teeth with rage. This was the last sort of publicity that virtuous man's soul craved. Thus to be gibbeted with old Sam Vince ! thus to be dragged down to the level of the Muirs ! to have people stopping him in the streets in order to commiserate Miss Boyle and ask for further particulars ! to know those who did not love him had got hold of a story they would never let die—a story which might crop up at any after time, and injure his own girls' prospects when they arrived at a marriageable age—the thing was awful ! Why—why had he ever listened to the voice of Marcella his wife ? why had he ever taken Clear Stream Cottage for Mrs. Boyle ? Why had he not insisted either on cutting her altogether, or sending her off to Dublin or Liverpool ? Why—

“Richard,” said Mrs. Vince, when his musings had reached this agonised point, “we must go to Clear Stream and see this poor girl. If ever in her life she needed a friend, she needs one now.”

Then Richard Charles swore as great an oath as such a man ever could swear, that he would not go one step to Dundonald, and that neither should his wife. If Miss Boyle had so far lost all sense of decency as to run off with a man, why, she must take the consequences.

“That she shall not, alone,” said Mrs. Vince.

“Marcella,” replied her husband, “you forget yourself strangely.”

Marcella swept across the library, where this conversation took place. She was a portly woman, as has been already mentioned—a woman with a presence. “Mr. Vince,” she said, laying one white hand on the table.

She did not speak another word—she only looked at him, but that was enough. He knew the hour had come when he must either fight or submit. He chose the wiser course, and—submitted.

“You shall not go without me,” he said, after an eloquent

silence. "My judgment is opposed to mixing ourselves up in the matter; still, I am willing to do what I can to hush up so great a scandal."

Mr. Vince at once decided in his mind the best thing to do was to marry Berna to Gorman, and ship husband, wife, and mother off to some distant colony.

"I shall not hesitate to write a cheque for a handsome amount to compass such an end," he declared.

"I am afraid a cheque will not be of much use," said Mrs. Vince.

"A cheque must always be of use," replied Mr. Vince, with conviction; and his wife, who like the galled jade had felt the smart of poverty, did not contradict his statement.

Then the carriage was ordered round, and they drove together to Clear Stream.

"It is necessary for you now," he judicially summed up at last, addressing his youthful kinswoman, "to adopt one of two courses. We cannot undo the past; so we ought to try to make the best of the present. I do not wish to say anything harsh, but it is impossible for us to blind ourselves to the fact that this scandal will most seriously affect your reputation; and you cannot repair it except by marriage or a criminal prosecution."

Berna did not move or speak—she scarcely seemed to breathe.

"Which shall it be?" asked Richard Charles, vainly trying to import an accent of persuasion into his tone.

Still Berna made no reply.

"Marriage seems to me the true solution of the difficulty. I certainly consider Mr. Muir ought to marry you, and that you ought to marry Mr. Muir."

Berna's lips moved, but no word escaped them.

"Why don't you answer your cousin?" cried Mrs. Boyle querulously. "He's your own first cousin once removed, and you can't get over that; though you may consider your relations on the mother's side scarcely good enough to look at."

Apparently, Berna did not consider her relations on the mother's side at all good enough to look at, for, without casting her eyes towards Mr. Vince, she said,

"I shall not marry Mr. Gorman Muir, and I shall not prosecute him."

"But you must do one or the other," explained Mr. Vince.

"Why must I? As I told you before, I have no complaint to make against Mr. Muir, and if I had I should not make it."

"Did ever anybody hear to the like?" demanded Mrs. Boyle, grasping the elbows of her chair with both hands, and raising herself into a sitting attitude. "Here's a girl enticed away in the dead of a winter's night, with nothing on her but a plaid shawl and an old crape bonnet—"

"The dress Miss Boyle had on, or whether she had on none, cannot affect the question," interposed Mr. Vince.

"Well, well, that may be your notion of it. Mine's different; and, if it came to the bit, I don't suppose you'd like to be taken away out of your warm bed without a rag of clothes on you."

Mr. Vince looked at his wife, and (figuratively) gnashed his teeth. He was a man who, all his life long, had sedulously devoted himself not merely to making money, but to correcting those errors left untouched by the refined training of the Ballynure Lancasterian school. He had been at the utmost pains to improve his grammar, colloquially. He spoke with a certain amount of precision. He fancied he had got rid, at one fell swoop, both of the Irish accent and of all Irish idiom. Helped by Marcella his wife, he felt he should not much care into what great rank wealth and Heaven decided he should go. One day he might wake to find plain Richard Charles Sir Richard; or he could hold his own amongst lords—yes, her Most Gracious Majesty (if so advised) could scarcely refuse to make him Lord Craigvallen, or, if she thought best, Baron Craigvallen of Craigvallen. As befitted a truly loyal Orangeman, he decided that the will of his Most Gracious Sovereign Lady

should be his law. Such were the dreams, sweet and pure, of Richard Charles; the terrible reality of his life was awaking to the fact of being first cousin to a woman whose accent was horrible, and who talked quite freely of "coming to the bit," and assumed an indecent tone of familiarity when addressing himself.

"Mrs. Boyle," he was good enough to explain to Marcella his wife—and it must have seemed pleasant to the lady to find so great a mind could, on occasion, descend to trifles—"says 'you' instead of 'that,' and 'nor' instead of 'than;' what can one do with such a person?"

"It would not signify to me," retorted his wife, "what she said or left unsaid if she were not such a fool."

"I do wish, Mrs. Boyle," remarked Richard Charles, finding his wife indisposed to come to his assistance, "we could discuss this most unfortunate business in a connected and reasonable manner."

"That's good, too, and me the only one among you takes the right way of looking at the disgrace we are all under! There's Berna, sitting as calm and unconcerned as you please, and saying she has no cause of complaint against the deceiving wretch carried her off to the uttermost parts of the earth—she couldn't have gone much further in the time if she'd had wings like a dove—to bring sorrow and ruin upon her."

Berna compressed her lips, but spoke never a word.

"Without going quite so far as that, Mrs. Boyle," replied Mr. Vince, "I may say it is a most serious matter, as your daughter will probably find to her cost ere long."

"She has done that already," interposed the irrepressible widow. "It only happened ten days ago; and yesterday morning she had a letter from Mrs. Admiral Crane, saying she couldn't think of having a girl that had got into such trouble living under the same roof with herself. Ever since, I've been at her. I was hoarse enough before, but I'm worse now. If I'd been well I'd have gone up to Mr. Garnsey, and asked him to send a constable to take that thief of the world off to prison."

I know right well what the end of it will be. She'll let him get clear out of the country, and then turn round and blame us all for not having justice done to her."

With a sort of dumb appeal, Berna raised her eyes to Mr. Vince.

"My own opinion, Mrs. Boyle," he said, answering the girl's look, "is, that the true solution of the difficulty is conciliation, not revenge. I have seen the young man. He called upon me—called at Craigvallen, in fact; and, I must confess, expressed himself with great propriety. I consider Mr. Gorman Muir"—here Richard Charles turned to Berna—"so far as personal appearance and outward manner are concerned, a far from objectionable person. Away from his friends he would—ah!—pass muster very fairly in ordinary society. Mrs. Vince agrees with me. Am I not correct, Marcella?"

"Yes, certainly," answered Mrs. Vince briskly. "I was quite taken with him, Berna. So sorry for his mad freak; so devoted to you! So handsome, so audacious, so gallant. I declare I felt more than half inclined to fall in love with him myself."

"There are some subjects, my dear," remonstrated Mr. Vince, "about which it is not well to joke. I consider this a very serious matter, very serious indeed."

"He'll find it so before I'm done with him," declared Mrs. Boyle. "It'll not be one thousand pounds, or two thousand, he'll get off with, I can tell him."

"Money will not patch up a woman's reputation," said Mr. Vince sententiously.

"Isn't that the very thing I've been saying to Berna? Ah! as I told her, she thought she was a made girl when she enticed Gorman Muir to take notice of her; but she'll find the difference now everybody's crying shame on her for going off with a man old enough to be her father."

"Mrs. Boyle, if you cannot discuss this unhappy affair in a sensible and proper manner, I must decline to interfere in it."

"I never asked you to interfere. I can manage my own concerns for myself. I don't want any help or advice; and as for letting Berna marry such a man—even if she was old enough to marry him, which she isn't—I would sooner see her in her coffin."

"O Mrs. Boyle, do not say that," entreated Mrs. Vince. "It is really the best thing Berna can do."

"I shall say it. I'll say what I choose, without your leave asked or granted. Do you think, because you are a few years older than me, I am only to speak at your bidding? You don't know Gorman Muir as I do. You don't understand the handful I have got in Berna."

"What we do understand," said Mr. Vince, rising, "is that you are amenable neither to feeling nor reason, and that the less we have to do with you the better. You were not remarkable for discretion when you were young, and you have certainly not gained wisdom with years."

"Other people, perhaps, though rich, are no wiser than I am," retorted Mrs. Boyle.

"That is a question into which I must decline to enter," said Mr. Vince loftily.

"Well, you have the temper!" cried Mrs. Boyle; "but don't heed me; as you know, I was always a spoilt child."

"I know nothing about that," replied Mr. Vince; "all I know now is you are a very foolish old woman. Come, Marcella, we are only wasting our time here;" and, with a hard set face and a defiant mien, Mr. Vince stalked out of the room, followed by an indignant wail from Mrs. Boyle of "Old woman, indeed!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE year 1851 had gone out as calmly and prosaically as year could depart. A dull damp autumn was followed by a green Christmas and fat churchyards. It was a season which in some insidious fashion brought death to many, illness to most, and low spirits to all. Even Mrs. Boyle the Dowager—Mrs. Boyle *par excellence*, who had a strong will and a marvellous power of asserting it—waxed weak under the burden of such mild weather, and, troubled with a nasty cough, kept the house, whilst her sleek carriage-horses ate their heads off in a roomy stable, and Forbes, her young coachman, who was only seventy years of age, enjoyed a compulsory holiday—as little to his taste as to that of the lady he served.

Mrs. Boyle was bored to death. She had long been bored ; but at that particular time she felt more bored than ever. Life was not turning out as she had expected ; and when a human being has passed fourscore, and found so far the whole game of existence a losing one, it is most unlikely that at the eleventh hour he or she will get dealt out such a hand of trumps as can compensate for the poor or unavailable cards Fate was pleased to accord previously.

Married while quite young—still in her early teens—to a man she loved ; rich, beautiful, well born—what girl ever started with fairer prospects ?

But on her wedding she was not half matured, and when at nineteen death struck down a husband she adored, her real character was still undeveloped. At first well-nigh inconsolable, for the sake of her son and daughter the young widow took up the burden of living, and bore it bravely.

She never married again. If she could have loved a second

husband much, she loved liberty and power more. With a wisdom and liberality rare in women even now—but rarer by far at that time—she ruled her household, governed her children, and managed the estate.

For a while suitors came to her, but at last even the most importunate left this exceptional widow in peace. She was not one of those women who keep their lovers as friends. Even had she been thus inclined, she was far too great a prize to be resigned with equanimity.

“You do not refuse me, because you loved your husband to distraction,” said one man, smarting under the bitterness of a refusal, “but because you are devoted to yourself.” There was an enormous amount of truth in this remark, and as the years went by it was a truth which became more and more patent. Mrs. Boyle was a good mistress, a liberal landlord, a staunch friend; but beyond everything she was a grand lady. Whatever or whoever else she might forget, Felicia Boyle was always remembered. Even in her earlier womanhood she adopted a style of dress which might have befitted some countess in the days when persons of condition wore clothing it would have been accounted sin for the commonalty to copy.

All through the district she was called, before she had counted thirty summers, Lady Boyle or Madame Boyle—Mrs. Boyle, never. She accounted herself a very great woman. She had been presented at Court. She had tripped stately minuets, and danced with dukes and ambassadors, and all the fine gentlemen of whom London, no doubt with reason, once felt so proud. She never gave up what she called her connection. “I have a daughter coming on,” she said. “I shall have to find a suitable alliance for my son. It will not do for me, meantime, to live the life of a recluse.”

Which was all very well; only ill-natured people were not slow to remark that, after her daughter's death—after her son had chosen a wife for himself—the Dowager kept up her state more determinedly than ever. In high dudgeon, the deposed Queen left Boyle Court, and repaired to Cheltenham, where she

dwelt after a sort of monarch-out-of-business fashion ; while her grandson Ulick was growing, as she fondly hoped, in comeliness and grace. Through him she trusted to gain the happiness her own son, with his prosaic and utterly unobjectionable marriage, had deferred. Everything, we are falsely told, comes to him who waits. Madame Boyle believed, if she only waited, she should still see some male belonging to her cutting a distinguished figure in politics, the army, or the navy.

"There is no other profession for a *gentleman*," she was wont to say ; and Ulick proved so entirely of her opinion that, carrying his practice a little further than her theory, he decided not to enter any profession at all.

Why should he? The heir to Boyle Court lacked no manner of thing that was good, and his grandmother, who, clever though she might be, had vague ideas on the subject of diplomacy, not merely supplied him with far more money than she ought to have done, but held firmly to the delusion that the young fellow would settle down ere long, and get into Parliament, and be Prime Minister before he was fifty.

Once again her hopes were doomed to disappointment. His ill-starred marriage shattered the fairest and fondest illusion of her life. Having chosen such a wife, Ulick Boyle was doomed. Anything else might have been remediable, but not Milly Vince. This awful misfortune, this terrible disgrace, caused the Dowager to bow her head and refuse to be comforted.

Still, though the tree was stricken, the roots had life, and, in time, around the bare trunk of dead hopes and disappointed ambitions there sprang up suckers, green and full of promise, that had this time for sap the future of a young and capable girl.

"I will train her," thought the Dowager ; "I will take and make her my own. She shall come out early, and marry soon. She shall be the mother of future statesmen. We will go to London, and mix with the best society in the metropolis."

It was a natural scheme, and seemed feasible. As a child,

Berna spent weeks and months at Cheltenham, where she "got the air of England on her tongue," which, later on, so stirred her mother's wrath. Afterwards the Dowager sent her to school, and paid the bills with rejoicing. Year by year the girl grew in grace and beauty.

"She will do," decided her benefactress; and then, in a spirit of lofty condescension, she proposed to accompany Berna when the girl returned to Boyle Court for her summer holidays. She had not seen the place for over forty years, and she had never seen the fair Milly at all. It was an awful visit. Though the Dowager only—as the lady she afterwards referred to as "that horrible creature" said in her detestable *patois*—"put in" a week, sufficient wretchedness was compressed into those seven weary days to have served for a lifetime.

Berna never recalls that period without a sense of shame and misery. The morning when the Dowager sent for post-horses to Westport, and shook the dust of Boyle Court off her feet, will remain stamped on her memory till she dies.

"As your father has chosen to make his bed, he will have to lie upon it," were her last words to Berna. "As for you, decide between your mother and me. Either you give her up or I give you up. I do not wish for an answer now. I will write to your unhappy father from Cheltenham;" and then again—to quote Mrs. Boyle—she "took herself off in a fine tantrum," pursued by what Milly really believed to be the scathing utterance of "Joy go with you!"

Berna's decision not to desert her mother—her "mad, ungrateful, wicked, perverse decision" (*vide* letter on the subject)—was a cruel blow to the Dowager.

"All my life long," she thought, "I have been planning for others, and no single project has ripened to maturity. I will plan no more. Herbert and his wife must manage without me. I will never take an interest in or care for any other human being."

This was easy to say; but she had always cared for Berna,

and never ceased caring for her, despite the way "the foolish, foolish girl" clung to her "wretched mother"—spite even of the scandal in which she at length became involved.

"It is a sad business," was the only comment she made to Sir Herbert, who broke the news, and was, perhaps, not so sorry to tell bad tidings as he ought to have been, "but I can do nothing. When the silly child elected to cast in her lot with her mother's dreadful connection, of course I was obliged to cease all intercourse. If she ever really wants our help she will write."

The Dowager expected Berna to write. Day after day, week after week, she waited, but Berna made no sign; and then the dull Christmas weather came, and a green unhealthy New Year; and the Dowager decided life was a great mistake, and that Cheltenham was a most undesirable place in which to reside. "Why do I stay here?" she thought. "When I get a little better I will consider the question of taking up my residence in London, where I can mix with my kind. I do not desire the society of widows and invalids; and really Herbert and his wife, who *will* come over to cheer me up, weary me to death. O, that poor girl! that poor, stupid, ridiculous, mistaken girl!"

One day the Dowager felt more bored and more low than usual. She had given orders she was not at home to any one except the doctor, and she, therefore, expressed a considerable amount of indignant surprise when her maid presented her with a card bearing the name of Gorman Muir, and asked if she could see the gentleman.

"Why, you know how ill I am!" she exclaimed.

"Burton told Mr. Muir you had a severe cold, ma'am; but he said so earnestly he wished to speak with you on particular business, Burton thought I had perhaps better bring up his card."

"Burton is an idiot, and so are you. What is the man like?"

"He is young and handsome, and—"

"Do you suppose I care about his age or looks? That is not what I want to know. Is he a farmer, or farrier, or what?"

"He looks as grand a gentleman, ma'am, as Sir Herbert himself. Burton says he is the image of Colonel Fortescue, who was reckoned the handsomest officer in the army, when—"

"Now, Heaven grant me patience!" exclaimed the Dowager. "Show the man up. Just give me that shawl to wrap round my shoulders, the room is chilly." Having invented which pleasant fiction, the old lady wound a square of exquisite white lace about her throat, and, with a touch of her former coquetry, smoothed back her snowy hair to receive the last man she expected would ever have come to see her.

Yes, he was handsome—more than handsome. "Sir Herbert himself" could not be accounted one half so good-looking. For a second the Dowager paused surprised; then, glancing at his card, she said a little insolently, "You are this—person—Mr. Muir, I conclude?"

"I am Gorman Muir, madam," he answered; "the person whose name you may have heard mentioned in connection with Miss Boyle."

"I think I have," agreed Berna's great-grandmother slowly, casting down her eyes and considering what she ought to do next.

Gorman looked the ancient lady over—looked at the white hair brushed back from her face; the Marie Stuart cap, of richest lace; the delicate fingers, glittering with costly rings; the thick, costly black silk, which fell in heavy folds around her stately figure; at the clear-cut, haughty features; the piercing, dark eyes; the set mouth; the room furnished with a lavish luxury—and thanked God he had come to beg no favour for himself—that the resolution formed before he left Ireland was one everything he saw tended to confirm rather than shake.

"Pray be seated, sir," said the Dowager at length, waving her jewelled hand with a stiff and stately courtesy.

"I will not detain you long," answered Gorman, availing

himself of the proffered chair. "I considered it only my duty to call and speak to you about the trouble I have caused Miss Boyle. What I want to say," he went on, finding the Dowager made no answer, "is, first, that I, and I alone, am the only person entitled to blame throughout the whole affair. Though I believed, and still believe, Miss Boyle was once not wholly indifferent to me, I desire to state that never, by word, or look, or sign, did she give the smallest encouragement to my pretensions."

The Dowager inclined her head.

"It gratifies me, Mr. Muir," she answered, "to hear you make so just and necessary an admission. At the same time, I must remark that, so far as I am aware, none of Miss Boyle's relatives ever supposed she looked with the smallest favour on your advances."

Gorman bit his lip; and then, in a tone as scornfully polite as the Dowager's own, replied,

"It is so extremely difficult to tell what relatives may or may not think on any subject, I think it quite as well to let you know Miss Boyle's disdain for me equals your own."

"Your statements sound a little contradictory. You say she once—how shall I express myself?—cared for you."

"I am sure she did. Before she knew I was Gorman Muir, and a struggling man, her young fancy went out to meet my devotion, or, since the beginning of time, all lovers have been wrong in their intuitions. In her nature, however, there is one passion stronger than tenderness, one passion strong and cruel."

"Indeed! and that is?"

"Pride, which could not endure the fact of her suitor being only a farmer's son."

For a moment Mrs. Boyle paused. It seemed to her so impossible this suitor with his high-bred courtesy, his mellow voice, his charming accent, his splendid figure, gallant bearing, and handsome face, was "only a farmer's son;" she was forced to try to gather her wits together before she said,

"I should be loth, Mr. Muir, to speak a word likely to wound you; but I find it necessary to ask whether you consider Miss Boyle's feeling wholly unnatural? Remember, that while putting this question, I fully recognise the personal advantages you possess, and am quite willing to believe your mental gifts are equally great."

"Thank you for a far too flattering estimate of a very commonplace man. Yet, though commonplace, I am a man; and therefore venture to say, if we are to talk at all, I should like to talk to you on an equal footing, and without any fear of giving offence."

"So far, Mr. Muir," said the Dowager, "you have shown me no necessity for talking at all; but if we are, as you suggest, to talk, you can certainly do so freely. Should I find anything you say offend me, I shall not hesitate to stop you at once."

Without waiting for a second, Gorman took his heart in his hand, and, never considering diamonds, or lace, or rank, or pride, or any other small item, answered,

"Naturally, a man who loves a woman regards her as standing on a higher level than his own; what I fail to see, however—what I have always failed to see—is why Miss Boyle should regard my father as being on a lower rung of the social ladder than her own mother."

For a moment the Dowager did not reply. Waiting for her to speak, Gorman forcibly realised from whom Berna inherited her pride and her great gift of silence. On the other hand, his hostess was considering she had never before met a man who, without actual rudeness, could hit out so straight and so hard. Even on the ground of variety, she liked his audaciousness, though she did not mean to let him suspect that fact.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing your father, Mr. Muir," she said, with freezing politeness; "but I have the misfortune of being acquainted with Mrs. Ulick Boyle. Am I to understand you consider that your father and Miss Boyle's mother stand on the same footing?"

"Hardly," answered Gorman; "but it would be difficult for me, without apparent incivility, to explain the difference between them."

"Do not, I entreat, allow any small matter of that sort to raise a barrier against our perfect comprehension of each other," said the Dowager, slowly fanning herself. There are times when the operation of fanning can be performed so as to madden the beholder. Gorman felt the operation was maddening him.

"Thank you, greatly," he returned. "As you are good enough to permit me to express my opinion, I will do so. Mrs. Boyle, though no doubt possessed of many excellent qualities, can scarcely be considered quite a gentlewoman; and assuredly she is not very wise. My father is not a gentleman, but he is wise."

The Dowager leaned back in her chair, and fanned herself with still greater deliberation.

"Which of the twain, Mr. Muir, should you consider the more gentle?"

"Comparisons are invidious," answered Gorman; "and, besides, I am not perhaps a fair judge."

"Meaning, of course, you are sure your father is the better man of the two."

"As you choose to put it, there is no resource but to answer yes. In many respects my father is really a most able man."

"If you allowed Miss Boyle to guess your opinion of her mother, I am not surprised at her rejection of your suit," said the Dowager, with an irritating smile.

"I cannot lay the flattery to my soul that any word I ever spoke influenced Miss Boyle's decision in the least," answered Gorman; "but whatever the reasons of her refusal may have been, it is useless now to discuss them. She refused me not once but twenty times. I am not a specially humble man, yet had I thought asking her the twenty-first time would have caused her to change her mind, I should have tried my fortune over again. That, however, is all past and done with."

The Dowager furled her fan, and looked at him surprised.

"You have not, then, come," she said, "to urge me to exert any influence over my young relative?"

Gorman laughed; but it was a bitter and a mirthless laugh. "You mistake me," he answered. "I would have done almost anything (you may know that by what I did do) to gain Miss Boyle for my willing wife; but I would not marry her unless she came to me of her own accord, without influence or compulsion. Till the night when I committed that mad act which might well have broken a weaker woman's heart, I did not understand her; I thought she was coy and proud. She is proud, but she is not coy. She told me—"

Suddenly he broke down: in the middle of his sentence he stopped. The very repression he had put upon his words and manner overstrained his strength. He could not go on. He rose and walked to the window and stood there, watched by the Dowager, who did not utter a syllable. "I beg your pardon," he said, returning when his passion had spent itself, "I did not know I was so weak. The first matter about which I came," he added hurriedly, to prevent comment on what had passed, "I have done with; the next has its origin in my reckless folly. God knows, I would sooner have shot myself than brought the sorrow I have upon the only woman I ever loved. I felt sure she would marry me willingly, remember, or I never should have placed her in such a position. I do not say this in the way of excuse, because nothing can excuse me, but I want you to know the facts. She will let me make no reparation. I stayed in the neighbourhood, so that if any of her friends wished to proceed against me I should be at hand. I would have given myself up, but that I feared by greater publicity I might hurt her even more than I had done. Everywhere, on all possible occasions, I have spoken about her as a man should speak of the woman he hoped would be his wife. I have amended my life, and my own small world knows it is only because I love and honour her that I have turned from evil and shall strive after good. It all sounds but

little, yet there is only one thing more I can do, and that is entreat of you to help me to help her."

"Help her—how?"

"Some day she will want money. Probably the day is not far distant. Her mother is ill—"

"Would she had died a quarter of a century since!" exclaimed the Dowager.

"I am a poor man," went on Gorman, unheeding the aspiration. "I was brought up to expect wealth, and then cast out because a vindictive woman lied concerning me; and all the money I have been able to realise, except a very few pounds, is contained in this envelope, of which I hope and trust you will take charge. You can offer assistance to Miss Boyle; I cannot. She might take it from you; she would not from me."

"Miss Boyle's mother," said the Dowager, "would accept alms even from a total stranger; but Miss Boyle, unless she has changed her nature, would not now accept a gift from me."

"You do not know, you cannot imagine, the misery of the life she must have led—a life that has eaten the grain out of existence. Ah! I can see a change even since I knew her. Every one who would love and care for her Mrs. Boyle offends. There is Mr. Vince, a man who, though he has risen from the ranks, has risen very high indeed. At first he paid the rent of Clear Stream Cottage, and made some annual allowance besides. Mrs. Boyle has so maddened him he refuses to continue any assistance after May. It is the same with every one else, and eventually they will be left utterly friendless. I asked Mrs. Vince, who not merely belongs to a high family, but is as good a woman as ever breathed, to see to my—my—to Miss Boyle, I mean.

'I love her as if she were my own daughter,' she answered, 'but what can I do? Mr. Vince forbids my visiting his cousin, and all through my married life I have made it a rule to please a husband who has been generosity itself to me.'

"Here is Mrs. Vince's photograph," added Gorman, taking

out his pocket-book and handing a carte to the Dowager. "I asked her to give me it, so that when far away I might comfort myself by looking at the likeness of one most truly fond of the girl who would not let me try and make her happy."

"She has a capable face," commented the Dowager. Her hand shook a little, and her voice had a jealous ring. "Yes, certainly there is strength in Mrs. Vince. And so even she cannot manage Mrs. Ulick Boyle. I am not surprised to hear it. I never met with such a woman. I do not believe out of Bedlam or in it her equal could be found."

"And yet, do you know," said Gorman, "that I should consider her eternal babble sweetest music if she were the mother of my wife."

"Do you mean to say you would live in the same house with her?"

"Certainly; I told her daughter so, and thereby most unwittingly gave offence."

The Dowager raised her eyeglass and looked at Gorman.

"Imbecility can go no further," she remarked at last. "You must have been very deeply in love! Not to bring back my lost youth, not to raise my husband from the dead, not even to regain my beauty—and that, you will say, is going as far as woman can—would I live for three days under the same roof with Mrs. Ulick Boyle!"

"And if you saw what her daughter has to endure, and how she bears the reproaches which are heaped on her, you would not wonder that I feel towards that daughter as I do. But I must not go on wearying you in this way. To revert to my request. There is no human being I can ask to stand between my darling and utter poverty save yourself. Do not refuse my prayer. I shall never trouble her or you again. I mean to die as utterly as a living man may. I shall have no means of knowing how it fares with—with—Berna; but there is enough in that envelope to keep her from knowing actual want for some time. You are irritated against her for loyalty to a most silly and selfish mother. Do not refuse what I beg,

though, on that account. Ah, do not shake your head. You will consent—I see you do. Thank you, a thousand times over! I am going now, with a lighter heart.”

“Stop,” she said, as he rose to go, “you must leave me some address, so that I may give an account of my stewardship.”

“I cannot do that,” he answered. “From to-day I shall be as dead as though the grass were growing over me.”

“Where are you going?”

“Where neither friend nor foe will find me.”

“That is nonsense,” she retorted; “you *must* come and see me again.”

“Never,” he replied, “never;” and he walked across the room.

“Wait a moment, Mr. Muir,” cried the Dowager, rising. “I want to speak to you. There is something I wish to say.” But even as she spoke he was gone. She heard the hall-door close, and, hurrying to the window, saw him striding along the street.

“What can he be going to do?” she wondered, while, forgetting her ailments, she stood vainly speculating about his intentions.

Just then a recruiting party passed by, their caps gay with streamers, their manners enticing, their looks jovial.

“That is what he means to do,” she thought with conviction; and going back to her chair, she sat looking at the fire with dry bright eyes.

“I wonder the girl refused him,” she considered; “but he would not have made her a good husband, even had other things been equal. Rash, impulsive, unbalanced, but O, what a lover!”

CHAPTER XLVII.

"I CANNOT tell you, Captain Ludham, how deeply I feel your kindness."

It was the Dowager who spoke; and the gentleman she addressed was that same graceless officer who had once, according to Miss Isabella Muir, gone up the staircase at Ardilaw three steps at a time.

The quondam Ensign was only adorned with "youth and beauty;" but the lady had put on all her bravery, and received her visitor with a genial and stately courtesy which utterly failed to produce the effect she intended.

Subsequently, in the ease of familiar intercourse, Carline's former lover was in the habit of alluding to Mrs. Boyle senior as a "tough old girl;" but on the afternoon when, by his own appointment, he called to see her, any one might have supposed him the best of young men—a young man who played the harmonium and instructed choirs, and got up classes, and "personally conducted" Sunday-school children when they went out for a summer outing.

"I thought I had better answer your note verbally," he said, after a few polite preliminaries had been gone through. "Your friend has enlisted in the uncommon name of Jones—John Jones."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Dowager; and she drew a long breath.

"Seems to me a pity; but I suppose he knows his own business best."

"I suppose so," she answered a little doubtfully.

"Is there nothing to be done in the matter?"

"Not that I know of."

"He would not thank any one, I conclude, for writing to his father?" said Captain Ludham, in the way of a suggestion.

"It would be necessary first to find out who his father is."

"Do *you* not know the gentleman who has the happiness to call him son?" asked the officer.

The Dowager reddened and hesitated.

"Because, if you do not, I do," he proceeded. "Our new recruit is not a man to be readily forgotten. I recognised him at the first intention."

"Indeed!" said the lady, disconcerted.

"Yes; the man you mean is Gorman Muir. Between such attached friends of his as I am sure we both are there need be no affectation of mystery. I only saw him once before; but he left an indelible impression on my memory. He had the handsomest black horse I ever beheld, and he came leading it across the sunlit fields of Ardilaw, where his father was superintending the carting of hay, if I remember rightly. The meeting between papa and prodigal—I suppose he must have been somewhat of a prodigal, though he certainly did not look like a man who had fed on husks and out-run his credit at his tailor's—was touching in the extreme."

"Were you acquainted with his father, then?" asked the Dowager, mystified not merely by such an amount of unexpected information, but by the manner in which it was conveyed.

"Well, very well; and his father knew me also well. He treated me with enormous kindness, to say nothing of an amount of plain speaking quite paternal. I met with a bad accident in Down, and was laid up at Ardilaw for a long time; so long, indeed, that I became quite a member of the Muir family. Charming family: all original, all diverse, yet all delightful! I recall the period I spent amongst them as one of the brightest spots in my life. Nice sort of ancient rookery—good house, fine old trees, large rambling garden overrun with weeds, wandering stream; just the place in which to dream away a summer. I quite regretted having to leave."

"And what kind of person is Mr. Muir the elder?"

"He does not 'favour' his son, as he himself would say; but I am sure the son is a chip of the old block. Personally, Mr. Muir reminds me of the scenery about the Causeway—grand, but rugged. Roses and lilies do not grow wild on that bleak stony soil. There is a touch of the north wind about him, which might seem repelling to a person who did not know his kind heart well. Of all the family, Miss Muir is the child who most resembles her papa. How I should delight to see her once more!" added the officer, with pensive tenderness.

"But who and what is Mr. Muir?" inquired the Dowager. "I am under the impression I heard he was a farmer."

"So he may be; but there are farmers and farmers. Besides, farming is the chief industry of Ireland—if one may so far misuse the word as to talk of industry and Ireland in the same breath. No one whose soul is not dead goes into business of any kind. He prefers to tickle the ground, and, as the ground grows nothing well except grass, very little tickling is required or given."

"I am an Irishwoman myself," said the Dowager.

"I should not have thought it," answered her visitor.

"And proud of the fact."

"I do not wonder at that. Irish ladies are the most beautiful and charming in the world."

"I fear you are a sad flatterer."

"No, indeed; though I have been a good deal in Ireland."

At which remark the Dowager laughed. This is a sort of thing which pleases some persons, even though they may be very wise and eighty years of age—precisely as a rattle pleases a child.

"And had Mr. Gorman Muir any profession?" she asked presently (lest these amenities should go too far), reverting to business.

"I do not think so, but I am in no position to answer with certainty. His father did mention that at one time he had a fancy for entering the army."

"He has carried out his fancy now," said the Dowager grimly.

"Yes; but after a very different fashion."

There followed a moment's silence, which was broken, to quote Captain Ludham's mental reflection, by the "Faubourg St. Germain."

"I fear I am troubling you with a great many questions; but a little time back you referred to Mr. Gorman Muir returning home in the character of a repentant prodigal. Had he previously left his father's house in disgrace?"

"Scarcely," laughed the officer. "He was only two years of age when his mother's uncle did about the most foolish and unkind thing possible, namely, adopted him. He was brought up in the midst of wealth; taught to consider himself the heir to a good property; and then, in a moment, cast out like Ishmael; not exactly for laughing at any elderly Sarah, but for some scandal connected with his great-aunt."

"With his—" suggested the Dowager, who believed her ears had deceived her.

"His great-aunt. Forgive my alluding to such a matter. It is not a thing one would mention before a miss in her teens; but staid people like ourselves are not to be frightened by shadows. I believe there was not a word of truth in the story. When we were stationed in Kilkenny I saw the lady, and should feel excessively uncomfortable if she owed me a grudge. For some reason she wanted to be rid of young Muir, and so trumped up a story about his being too fond of her, which her husband believed and acted on."

"But, excuse me for a moment. I think, if I heard aright, you spoke of a great-aunt."

"When an old man is silly and a young woman wise, fifty years or so of disparity sinks into insignificance. The great-aunt is under thirty, Gorman Muir under thirty likewise. Being a particularly shy person, it will not, perhaps, be necessary for me to say more."

"I am afraid Mr. Gorman Muir is very wicked."

"So many excellent people have decided. He may be. At all events, over that affair very few cared to give him the benefit of any doubt. My own conviction is he was somewhat hardly dealt by, and that, had he been only ordinarily prudent, he might have crept back again into favour. However, he chose to go a break-neck pace, and wind up with a final escapade which has, for some reason best known only to himself, ended in the Queen's shilling—and John Jones."

"It seems a terrible story. Is his mother living?"

"No. Mr. Muir has been the happy husband, and is the still happier widower, of three wives. When I was at Ardi-law he publicly announced, to all whom it might concern, that he did not intend to essay any further matrimonial experiment."

"Was his first wife this young man's mother?"

"Yes; the daughter of Mr. Gorman of Clonmellin. She was not merely a lady, but her people were possessed of a fine property. It may give you some idea of Mr. Hewson Muir's capacity when I tell you he induced this Katherine Gorman to leave her home in order to marry him."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Dowager.

"That is what has prejudiced people against Mr. Muir. In a country where heiresses are few and far between, and many men of good position looking out for them, it is natural one of the number should be grudged to a person of no known family. Miss Gorman, had she married suitably, would have brought a good dowry in her hand; as matters stood, Mr. Muir only received about a thousand pounds, which he has increased to a creditable amount."

"Really, Captain Ludham, your knowledge of this strange family seems exhaustive."

"There is nothing remarkable about the matter; after all, Ireland is a very small place, and there are very few people in it."

The Dowager slowly fanned herself. She was considering her next step. Captain Ludham watched her with interest.

"I wonder," she said at last, "whether I might venture to tell you I have special reasons for wishing to glean as many particulars as possible about this reckless and unprincipled young man?"

"It would be disingenuous of me to affect ignorance that such is the case."

"Do you mean that you—"

"I mean that I know a good deal of the difficulty you must have had with the Muirs," he answered, smiling. At last he felt they were getting to the kernel of the business. "That was one reason why I thought it better to call, rather than write."

The Dowager bit her lip. Here was a dreadful, perhaps dangerous, young man. She began to feel sorry she had communicated with him. He had a pleasant face; frank, free, guileless manners; moreover, he was one of her own order: nevertheless, she did not quite like the turn affairs were taking. She had thought to lead up to the matter with skilful diplomacy, and, behold, there seemed to have been no need for diplomacy at all.

"We fellows who are always knocking about the world, moving from place to place," said Captain Ludham, when she had reached this precise point in her regret, "of necessity become acquainted with a great variety of people, hear a lot of strange stories, and obtain a vast amount of information concerning families. Some of us forget; some of us don't care about anything or anybody but ourselves; some of us (not many) do make a bad use of our knowledge; some of us feel that we should like to help a lame dog over his stile if such helping did not involve much expense or trouble."

"And under which category am I to class you?" asked the Dowager, with would-be playfulness.

"Well, I have never played the *rôle* of Good Samaritan. Good Samaritans seem to me, as a rule, awful bores. But still, if, without inconvenience, I could pick up a fellow who was down, I think I should pick him up. In this case, how-

ever, there is every reason why I ought to stretch out my hand. Young Muir's father laid me under obligations I can never repay; and this escapade of the unruly Gorman places me in a difficult position. I cannot take any notice of our friend the new recruit, who must be merely John Jones to me; and yet, it is most disagreeable to be obliged to ignore his existence."

"Do you not consider it strange that he should have entered your regiment?"

"Did not know I was in it. I exchanged from the Rutlandshire Ragamuffins more than a year ago. He would have avoided me like a pestilence. I wish devoutly he had."

"Do you suppose he recognised you?"

"Certain. A horrified look passed over his face—poor devil! Pray excuse the expression. I don't know what to do, I confess. I rather hoped you had some plan. It was freely said—"

"What was freely said?" asked the Dowager, as he broke off short.

"Pray do not be vexed—people will talk, you know."

"That is perfectly true. But what I want to know is what they talked about—that is, if the talking concerned me or mine."

"Of course, you must be aware that young Muir's abduction—shall I call it?—of Miss Boyle was a good deal more than a nine days' wonder across the Channel. The Gormans of Clonmellin are well known in the North of Ireland, and Mr. Trevasson equally well known in the South. When once a tale of that sort gets about, it flies. All kinds of rumours were flying. A relation of mine happened to be quartered in Belfast at the time, and, according to his account, bets were made that—"

"Having begun, Captain, you ought not to hesitate about finishing."

"Thank you, that is quite true; it is far better for me to tell you exactly the state of public opinion. The general idea

seemed to be that Miss Boyle ought to marry him, and that she would."

"Because he had deceived and entrapped her away from home? Certainly a most remarkable conclusion!"

"Still, Mrs. Boyle, put it as you like, the facts are extremely awkward. At first the mother makes a fearful disturbance—goes about like Saul, muttering threats and calling down fire from heaven upon the culprit's head. The story gets wind, and everybody waits to hear what is done next. Nothing is done. Mr. Vince, one of the northern lights, and as great a prig as ever I met at a heavy provincial dinner, interferes, and nothing comes of his interference. Not a single person connected with what the newspapers described as an 'outrage' is called to account. All at once there seems as anxious a desire to hush up the matter as there was at first to publish it abroad. The young lady's mother, who at one time was always to be met with in Belfast, frequents the gay streets of that fashionable resort no more. Mr. Vince declines to hear or say anything on the subject. An elderly and sadly proper old lady, who had arranged to receive Miss Boyle as companion, refuses to ratify the arrangement. Mr. Gorman Muir rides to hounds, lounges up and down High Street, and is to be seen in many other places, but nobody thinks of cutting or interfering with him. Can you wonder that the wisdom of Ulster is all at sea? Do you marvel that people say they ought to marry each other? I understand your natural anxiety. Upon my word, I came here solely to help you if I could."

"I fear the pity I felt for a wild and untrained young man has given you cause to misjudge my motives," said the Dowager.

"Not at all. I honour you for them. Money—and not much money either—can, I suppose, make your young relative and Gorman Muir happy. You are willing to find that money. You are right. Marriage is the true solution of the difficulty. Let the lady be what she may, the Irish will always agree to think her wrong till she is a wife. If I can help you in any

way— What is the matter, Mrs. Boyle?" he added, as the Dowager suddenly fell back in her chair pale and trembling. "I am so grieved. Let me ring for your maid. No? Forgive me, I entreat, for talking with such brutal frankness! You were so calm I had not a notion; and I felt you really ought to know how the thing was looked upon."

"Sir," she said, wiping her eyes, "you do not know Berna Boyle, or you never could have suggested such utterly baseless slanders against a helpless girl."

"I suggest slanders!" repeated the officer. "My dear madam, you have utterly misunderstood me. It was only because I knew she had been slandered—that I know she will be slandered—that I came here. Why, you yourself must have had some idea of the kind, or you never would have wanted to learn the name under which Mr. Gorman Muir meant to seek the bubble reputation."

"I have given you occasion to misunderstand me and my intentions," returned the lady, with proud humility. "Explanation is impossible; but you certainly have misunderstood me. Nothing could grieve me more than a marriage such as you suggest. It would be unfitting in every way."

"Of course you are better acquainted with the state of the case than I can be—"

"I believe it is no secret that Mr. Muir exhausted every argument to induce my young kinswoman to look favourably upon his suit, and failed."

"I know that was said, but, I fear, not generally believed."

"And the only motive which aroused my interest in the lover was a doubt as to whether at some point in the transaction Miss Boyle might not have been—all unwittingly, perhaps—to blame."

"That was extremely thoughtful of you."

"Her mother, a most silly and objectionable woman, having somehow got mixed up with persons unsuitable, I should imagine, as associates, the girl may—though it seems

to me unlikely—have given this young man some encouragement.”

“She may,” agreed the officer promptly.

“I do not believe she did,” said the Dowager resentfully; “but it is not impossible he might have misconstrued her manner.”

“He might.”

“And it seems to me a terrible thing for any one possessed of his manners, appearance, and presumably education, to sink, on account of a love disappointment and one rash act, into a common soldier.”

“It is. I can say, positively, you are not wrong on that point.”

“Therefore I wish to know what becomes of him.”

“And not to take any steps towards procuring his discharge?”

“Certainly not.”

“Or enabling him to enter the army in a higher grade?”

“You have totally misapprehended me.”

“And if, without rudeness, I dare venture to express my thoughts, you have utterly puzzled me.”

“May I ask how?”

“How! Good Heavens! here is a man who has done the greatest wrong almost a man can do a girl—”

“Surely, Captain Ludham, you are putting matters far too strongly.”

“It is you who do not realise matters, Mrs. Boyle. You may think you know the world well, but you cannot imagine the capital the world makes out of a thing like this. Whether by her own will or his, the girl was away from home for hours. Why, had such a thing happened to one of Mr. Muir’s daughters, he would have had a license or a warrant before the day was out!”

“You may be very sure Berna Boyle’s friends will never apply for either.”

“Then they are wrong. I have never seen Miss Boyle,

but I declare to you were she my sister I would put matters in train for doing her justice before I slept. These things stick like burrs. I entreat of you to buy this young man off, and arrange matters so that he and your relation can be married without delay. I would buy him off myself but that I feel sure such a course would only result in his enlisting again the next day."

"You are extraordinarily kind."

"I am really very much in earnest."

"And so am I. Believe me, please, when I assure you there is nothing I desire less than to see my great-granddaughter the wife of this unfortunate man. Further, if I wished such a match, she would not agree to it. I know her; know her pride and her self-will. If she would not for my sake give up a mother whose lightest word must cost her a heart-pang, is it likely she would take a husband who tried to win her by compulsion?"

"It is impossible for me to answer," replied the officer. "Women are enigmas."

"Men imagine so; but the reading of their natures is, nevertheless, simple enough."

"Is it?" retorted Captain Ludham. "I should not have thought so; but I am open to conviction. Perhaps you will tell me why—though you neither wish to benefit young Muir nor marry him to Miss Boyle—you are anxious to know what he does in the future."

"I am interested in him."

"Why? Ah, you can't or won't tell me, but I can tell you," went on the officer laughingly: "because he is a *mauvais sujet*—in other words, a bad lot. Ladies love sinners: the greater the sinner the more they love him. Moral young fellows like myself, who go to bed early and eschew cards and forswear champagne, and never say naughty words, and dance only with the girls our mammas like and approve, are abhorrent to your sex; whereas a dashing sergeant in the devil's brigade commands all your sympathies. I can comprehend

the infatuation. Sinners have the strongest charm for me. For no earthly consideration would I abduct a woman in the high and mighty Gorman Muir fashion. Yet I envy him for his daring. My mother says I have no heart. Perhaps that is true. Nevertheless, I admire a rough and ready lover when I see him; and I only wonder your relative did not go to Scotland with him and return Mrs. Gorman Muir. Had I been a woman, I could not have refused him after such a touching proof of his affection."

"I imagine you are not in the least in earnest," said Mrs. Boyle.

"Am I not? Well, at any rate, you will see whether I do not help Muir by every means in my power."

"Then perhaps you will not consider it too much trouble to keep me informed of his whereabouts."

"I will do so with the greatest pleasure; and if occasionally you permit me to call, shall account myself more than rewarded."

"I do not know how to express my thanks."

"The compliment is entirely on my side. Should you at any time find cause to reconsider your decision, you will not hesitate to say so, and let me try to assist you."

"Such a time is unlikely to come. Nevertheless, I will remember your offer gratefully."

In some countries about a hundred small coins represent a penny; no doubt those hundred small coins have their use, though all eyes cannot discern it.

In similar fashion, modern society cannot change or receive the smallest token of truth without a thousand comparatively useless words surrounding the transaction. It is perhaps for this reason men who go straight to the point are usually deemed fools or hypocrites.

We have arrived at a state of life and condition of mind in which mahogany is only thought real when French-polished. Sitting apart, however, in a dreary barrack-room, Gorman Muir felt that his sin and its expiation, robbed at last of all glamour

of romance, were terrible realities. For he had left behind everything a man cares for, or values ; cut himself adrift from friends, hope, and country ; and all because he loved a girl too much—he with whom the position had been before reversed during all his previous life.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN the after time Berna never cared to recall even to herself the wretched months which ensued after that wild night she spent listening to the raging storm and the lashing of the waves at Groomsport. She had been often miserable enough previously, God knew ; but all the troubles of her young life faded into insignificance when contrasted with the scorn and sorrow she was then called upon to face and bear.

To the continual blister of her mother's tongue the outer world now added its irritating savin ointment of contemptuous malice. It is easy for any one to say he despises society's verdict, but when the verdict comes to be passed it is hard to bear. Berna found it very hard. The whole of the blame was laid at her door. Pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy were the least of the sins attributed to the "widow woman's daughter." When she passed through the village she knew the idle gossips standing before their open doors were whispering about her ; if she met two men on the road they significantly touched elbows, and then fell to talking about Gorman Muir and how "things stood between the girl and him."

Whether actual sin were attributed to her or not, no one took her part. "Set her up, indeed !" said the best disposed faction. "What more could she want than a fine handsome young man, who has gone clean to the devil because she thinks herself too good for him ? She may wait a while before such a chance comes her road again. There are not many would care for a girl with such a white face and burdened with such a foolish old mother, too. As Hewson Muir says truly enough, she has laid a spell on him. That sort, without a bit of blood in their cheeks, are never just right. And look at the

way she keeps herself to herself—it's not natural. Did ever you know about the white bird at Gray Abbey that used to sit its lone—never another near it? Well, she minds me of that bird. There's something strange about her; but there, she's half English, and they're all queer alike."

"Never tell me!" another would declare. "If Gorman Muir didn't take her, he'd his reasons; pack of nonsense saying she wouldn't have him: she'd only have been too glad of him. Grander than Gorman, is she? Why, man, you'd make a dog laugh to hear you! That silly old wife of a mother of hers was the talk of Belfast once upon a time; and as for Sam Vince, many's the day I've seen him so drunk he'd to hold on the car for fear he'd fall off. There was no pride about *him*; he never refused a glass from anybody willing to pay for it."

As for Mr. Muir, he had nothing to say either way except that "the young Jezebel had parted father and son, and that she had neither heart nor sense nor feeling. She's waiting, most likely, for the Lord-Lieutenant to come along and ask her to set up housekeeping with him," he declared with bitter irony. "Well, well, it may chance before she dies she may cast a longing backward glance at Sunnyside and Gorman Muir."

"I would sooner," wrote Gorman, "have cut off my right hand and plucked out my right eye than caused you such grief."

It was his final farewell—the last letter he wrote on Irish soil—and then he went to Beechfield to bid Miss Garnsey good-bye.

"Be kind to her," he entreated.

"I cannot," she answered.

Then he laid his hand on Miss Garnsey's shoulder, and looked straight in her plain shrewd face, before he said,

"You will be generous for my sake—for the sake of a man neither you nor she will ever see again."

O lonely heart! O solitary Berna! How lonely, how

solitary, she felt when Gorman had really gone, no words can tell.

Free were all the roads and lawns and hedge-paths now to traverse. Under the arching trees now came no horseman to stir the girl's heart and vex her temper. One human being had taken himself out of her daily life, and the whole world appeared empty. The very streamlet seemed, as it ran, to murmur and lament for the handsome romantic lover who would listen to its murmur no more.

He was gone!—nor father nor sister nor friend knew whither. Had he died he could not have vanished more utterly. Berna's prayers in church need no longer have been disturbed by the thought of a pair of rare brown eyes. Yet those eyes had never previously haunted her as they did now their owner looked at her no more. She could sing, and there was no eavesdropper to listen. She could stand beside the arch in Knock graveyard, and never a soul come nigh to interrupt her musings.

Like her mother, the girl began to feel very weary of that placid village. Its fair face chafed her; the soft green hills, the belts of dark plantation, the distant heights, the glimpses of sea and mountain, only awoke memories she would fain have forgotten.

"Let us go away, mamma," she cried at last in her despair. "Let us go to England, or anywhere on earth away from Down."

"O, that's the tune, is it, now?" retorted Mrs. Boyle. "We're to pack off, bag and baggage; take our staffs in our hands and shoulder our wallets, the minute you want to move! When I wanted to go, when I was fairly sickened of the desolation of my life, it was 'Where would we find a sweeter home? I think we were fortunate to meet with so quiet a cottage!' Dear, dear! it's no wonder I'm worn to a thread-paper with your whims and fancies. When you're about it you'd best say where we'd get money to go to England or any place else. If you were like another girl, it's sitting down this

minute you'd be, pen in hand, confessing your manifold sins and wickedness St. Paul bids you think about, to the Dowager—you might tell her the bad child you've been to the best of mothers. If you said you'd fairly broken my heart, you wouldn't be beyond the mark. If she knew all the stiff-neckedness that's in you and could hear my cough, which would frighten her, she might send some sort of help to take us away from this hole, where Richard Vince buried us alive out of his sight, as Abraham did Sarah."

"It's no manner of use talking about going now, Miss Berna," said Ruth solemnly; "the mistress isn't well enough to go, even if you'd the money to take her. Wait till the fine weather comes, and then, if please God we get the cough under, maybe Mrs. Vince would give you a helping hand to move her to the shore. She's ill, dear, at last in earnest. She's far worse than she lets on."

And so the weeks went by, and life at the cottage dragged slowly and anxiously away.

One day in the early spring Mrs. Ulick Boyle sat in the little parlour at Clear Stream cowering over a turf fire. No child's puzzle, cast aside in haste and confusion, could have looked less likely to be made serviceable once more than the widow. She was thinner than ever, but her figure had lost all its former symmetry. Huddled together regardless of appearances, her black dress brown with wear, her cap cast aside, an old shawl drawn across her bosom and tied round her waist, she no more resembled the still frisky Milly, who returned to Belfast determined to be seen and to conquer, than the featherless, disconsolate, excommunicated Jackdaw of Rheims—that bird which, in the pride and glory of his sleek wickedness, stole the ring.

Poor Mrs. Boyle! if her summer had been a long one, it was all over now; not even the ruddy sun of autumn threw any cheering beam across the drear landscape of a wasted useless life. Over the bare fields, wherein no crop of promise had ever sprung, whence no golden grain was ever carried,

winter, in a moment, as it seemed, began to stretch a pall of misty gloom. There had been no intermediate state of crisp October—of gorgeous colour—of woods where the withered leaves of a kindly and useful past make a fragrant pathway for the feet of those pacing slowly onward to a land where the trees are green eternally, and flowers bloom for aye.

She had never conned a lesson save in the school of folly. She had never really cared for nor considered any one save herself; she had no root of goodness, no depth of soil; and accordingly when the evil days came, she shrivelled up under adversity's cutting wind.

For months she had been ailing, though she said, "I'll be right well come the spring, Ruth; and then they'll find, spite the way they've striven to keep me under, that I spring up better nor the blessed grass. As my poor father (you mind him?) used to say, 'A cat has nine lives; but you have ninety, Milly.'"

Just about that time Mrs. Boyle seemed to find it hard work to sustain one life, even though possessed of ninety. The green, damp winter had, to use her own expression, "tried her sore." Cold followed cold. She was racked with pains, which she stoutly denied were rheumatic.

"It's like your fun," she said, when this was suggested, "making an old woman of me!" She missed the congenial society which had upheld her. "I'm almost dead for the want of a bit of life," she complained. The future looked very dark. The time was approaching when, according to Mr. Vince's statement, all help from him was to cease; and in fine, if the widow did not say "All things are against me," it was merely because that particular Scriptural expression did not chance to be included in the strange medley of biblical odds and ends stored away in her shattered brain.

Why or wherefore she did not know, but her "luck had turned," and the conviction that this was so proved a very bitter pill to swallow.

During the previous summer her sun had seemed in the ascendant—now it was below the horizon.

The friends who delightedly gathered round to hear of the conquest she had made, and ask particulars concerning the notable captive of her bow and spear, had long been conspicuous by their absence. One by one they dropped off. Even the last of the party, Mrs. Gray and 'Tilda Sheill, had achieved the feat of making Mrs. Boyle understand it was possible to have too much of a good thing.

Amongst all her former acquaintances there was not a person who had not wearied of the widow. "There is no good in her," said Mrs. Gray to Miss Sheill, after the pretended outbreak of smallpox episode; "I never could call my house my own while she was coming to it. She was either 'on the go' from morning to night, or else sitting in that old armchair, talking nonsense such as a child would have thought shame to speak. I've often quaked for fear any person of sense might call while she was here. I'm fairly tired of her, 'Tilda, and so I tell you."

They were all tired of her. With a touching unanimity, when Mrs. Boyle's former acquaintances found there was no man breaking his heart for the widow—that Richard Vince had withdrawn the light of his countenance, and that the great man's cousin would shortly only be able to reckon on sixty pounds a year—they suddenly discovered Milly "had gone off wonderfully," "trouble had changed her," she "wasn't the woman she was;" and then they began forming plans for her future which would cause her to remove a long way from Belfast.

There was no single spot on the world's surface where, they felt assured, she might not do better than near them. Times had changed, and not for the happier. Not a soul now said, "Stop among us that you know, Milly, and that know you."

Sensitiveness was not a fault which could be attributed to Mrs. Boyle; yet as it is not wholly impossible to make even

a rhinoceros feel, conviction at length entered her mind that "she wasn't wanted."

There are few things harder to bear than knowledge of this kind, and Mrs. Boyle did not bear it at all well. She fumed and fretted, and tried to conquer Fate; but it would not do. When a lady is received by another lady who enters a room attired for walking, and who does not sit down or ask her visitor to sit down, the combat becomes unequal. Further, when she is not offered "bite or sup," and her querulous complaints of ill-health are answered by wondering remarks as to why the invalid does not stop at home and nurse herself, it is as well to throw up the sponge at once. One day Mrs. Boyle did this. It was then her poor puzzle was cast aside, never to be pieced together again in this world.

"I feel mighty cold and chilled, Ruth," she said on her return home. "Make me a drop of two-milk whey. Maybe it would warm me."

To the end of her life Berna Boyle will always thank God that she "stuck to her mother." That mother had tried her as only woman born of woman can try a woman; but at the last she won her reward. To say that Mrs. Boyle ever grew loving and motherly would be to assert an impossibility; but during the course of those few sad months she turned to her daughter, and clung to her with a tenacity which, though it had its source in utter feebleness of character, did duty for all the affection she was capable of feeling. She never ceased to find fault with Berna; there was nothing the girl could do that gave entire satisfaction. Her faults were constantly recited; her sins of omission and commission furnished the text for many a rambling sermon. But as the widow tottered onward, disputing each step of the way along which Death was leading her, she developed a restless liking for Berna, and never seemed at ease unless the girl were by her side.

A doctor had been called in; but now Mrs. Boyle "wouldn't have him at any price."

"If I'm to die, let me die in peace," she said. And in-

deed, when a patient is in low spirits and wants keeping up, there does seem some cruelty in talking about decline and a broken-down constitution, the rules of ordinary prudence having been overstepped, with a few remarks thrown in about advancing age, and people being unable to do with impunity when old the things which at twenty left no ill effects.

"I wonder how he would like for anybody to say the things to him he said to me; and beside his white hair I'm a child, in a manner of speaking. I'd like well for one of the big men out of Belfast to see me. If Richard Vince was not made of pig-iron, he might have brought somebody with sense to give me something. Ah, when the doctors can do no more for him, maybe he'll wish he had spent a trifle of his filthy lucre on me. But it'll come home to him, never fear. I mayn't be here to see, but whoever lives can mind my words. What's that you're saying? Will I let you write and ask a clever doctor to come down? If that isn't you all over! I'd laugh if it didn't hurt my inside. Where's the fee to come from? Have you found a full stocking in the thatch, or a crock of gold in the chimney?"

It was a more sensible question than Mrs. Boyle usually ventured on. At that moment the domestic purse was sadly lean. Berna and Ruth had been what the master mind styled "madly wasteful." That they refrained from spending on themselves was only an additional sin.

"Just as if I wanted anything more than a cup of weak tea and a bit of dry bread!" said the widow. "But you're that foolish, Berna, you'll leave us naked beggars before you've done, I can see plainly."

The household could not have proved much worse off had this dismal prophecy been accomplished. Heaven only knows what Berna had hoped in the way of help; but it is certain that, owing to her "wild way of getting everything came into her head," the pecuniary position had become desperate. In May a half year's income would be due; but then Mr. Vince's help was to cease, and they were in debt to Mr. Muir, with

whom Mrs. Boyle, for reasons of her own, had continued to deal.

"Never you trouble your head about me," he said to Berna, with a rough sort of consideration. "I daresay we won't fall out over the account." And again: "Your mother never will be fit to move at May, even if she'd got a place to move to. Stop as long as you like. I wouldn't wonder but me and Mr. Vince could make that all right between us. After what you've done me out of, Miss Boyle, you needn't be making as if you couldn't thole being a pound or two in my debt. I'm vexed for your mother. She's a foolsih woman, I allow; but there's not much harm about her. Once the fruit comes in, we'll keep her supplied constant. She always did allow the Ardilaw black currants were the finest she ever tasted."

And Berna could not answer either in assent or dissent, or even smile, when she remembered why her mother had so praised the produce of Mr. Muir's garden.

"Poor mamma," she thought; "poor, poor mamma!"

For the beginning of the end had come, and the end itself could not be far remote. It was not always now that Mrs. Boyle was able to walk even so far as the parlour. Often, when she did get up, she remained entirely in her bedroom; while for days together she remained in bed, declaring vehemently all the time she was "getting on as well as could be."

"I was just looking round me," she said, on that breezy afternoon in April, seated close to the fire, and bending forward so as to get the full benefit of whatever heat it gave out, "and considering how soon a house goes to wrack and ruin when a mistress is laid by. It's well to be seen you haven't had me dusting, and settling, and contriving. Often and often I lie awake in my bed, wondering what you'll do when I am gone. Tell me that now," she added, turning suddenly towards Berna.

"O mamma, do not talk in that way!"

"In what way? Why, you poor foolish thing, I declare you are crying! You are a fine one to have about anybody

that's ill! I'm not going to leave you. Many's the time I know you have thought you'd be better without me, taking your own headstrong way. But you've found what that has done for you; and now, when I pass a word in joke, you can't bear it, but begin whimpering like a baby—and I, that never could endure the sight of wet eyes!"

Berna went to the hearthrug, and knelt beside her mother, and said,

"I will try not to vex you," stroking the wasted cheek in an agony of sorrow; "but do not talk about leaving me. I cannot bear it!"

"You see who was right after all. Where would you find another to put up with you as I've done? I was always good to you, Berna, always. I never lifted my hand to you, though you've often angered me sore. Maybe, if I'd beaten you more, things might have been better for us all; but my heart wouldn't let me. Many's the time, when you were a child, you've turned and looked at me with those big eyes of yours, till I wondered sometimes if you were right in your head."

"Perhaps I was not, mother—perhaps I am not now."

"I don't know that I would go as far as that. You've improved wonderfully since I've had you all to myself to train up in the way you should go, through green pastures and beside still waters. It's inconceivable the effect good example has. Besides, you wanted taking down, and you have been taken down. Goodness knows it's a broken and a contrite heart you've caused me; but if the disgrace is of benefit to you in the long-run, you'll not hear me complain. As my father used to say, when I was running my legs off, first for one and then for another, 'The last person you ever think of is Milly Vince.'"

"Shall I put a pillow to your back, mamma?"

"What would I want with a pillow? To hear you talk, anybody might think I was getting ready for my grave. I'd be easy enough, mind and body, if it wasn't for wondering what we'll do about money."

"I wish you would not vex yourself about money. We shall get enough, somehow."

"If that isn't your father all over! I never could get him to listen to a word about his affairs; and see the end he came to. And then there's you wouldn't behave as you ought. Why, we might have been rolling in comfort, instead of starving with the cold and hunger, had you known how to keep yourself to yourself, and leave a man alone who wanted to have no sort of say to you."

"Perhaps I was all wrong," agreed Berna meekly; "but do not think about that now."

"I wonder if you wrote to Richard Vince, and said you were sorry for the shame and trouble you have brought on us all, and will try to be a better girl in the future, whether he would send us a few pounds?"

"I do not know, mamma. I can try."

"After all, maybe it might be better not to let yourself down too low. He would perhaps cast it up to you afterwards. Ah! he is the mean wretch, and she's not much better; and that just minds me of something I want to say to Ruth. Call her, Berna."

"How are you feeling yourself now, mem?" asked Ruth, as she entered.

"O, I am well enough! I'm only sitting over the fire resting myself. I'm not going to die yet awhile—I'm not thinking of dying. Still, I suppose even the best of us must go to a better world sometime. More's the pity. I am sure this world is good enough for me; but, of course, He that made it ought to be able to judge, and it's not everybody is contented and happy like me."

"It's not everybody wants to stop here," remarked Ruth, feeling something was expected from her.

"Isn't that what I've been saying? Well, when I have to go—I'm not going yet, and it's likely as not, with my good temper and fine constitution, and easy way of laughing at the worst of troubles, I might live a couple of hundred years yet."

But supposing I happened to be needed in heaven in a hurry, and had to start at once, I want to tell you, I'll never rest in my grave if you put me in Dundonald churchyard."

"Mamma, mamma!" moaned Berna.

"What's the matter now? I am not afraid like you. I've done my duty faithfully, and no one can say a word to me whenever I may go. What I want you both to promise me is, that somehow you'll get me to Ballynure. It's no use talking to Richard Vince. He'd lay me in any hole—the back of a ditch he'd consider good enough for me. Do quit crying, Berna; it provokes me to see you. Can't I speak about a funeral or anything comfortable without starting the tears running down your cheeks like pebbles?"

"If it'll be any ease to you, mem," said Ruth—and her own eyes were not dry or her voice quite steady—"I'll promise to do all that lies in my power to take you where you want; still, you must mind it's a long, long road."

"I know that. But I never was one made any objection to travelling; and I'd be decently put in the ground there, which I wouldn't here. The people for miles round would come to the burying just for curiosity, and on Sundays they'd be saying to one another, 'This is where Milly Vince is that made the great match.' While at Dundonald, if anybody ever talked about me at all, it would be only as the widow woman whose daughter went off with a man wanted nothing to say to her of any sort or description."

"When you cannot stay with us, mamma," said Berna, in a voice choked with tears, "we will try to do what you wish."

"Say you will do it, and then I'll be content. With all your faults, I never knew you break your word. You will? That's right; not that you could have done less, after all I've gone through for you. And, Ruth, you'll see me over yourself, won't you? Ah! it's a fine heartsome place up there; not like this, nothing but trees and houses, but bare

as my hand, with the wild wind sweeping across it. When I get better we'll go and take a look at my calf-ground, won't we, Berna?"

"Ye-es, mamma."

"Did you ever see her like?" demanded Mrs. Boyle: "roaring and crying as if she wasn't a year old. For all you've been such a bad child to your mother, you're fond of me, though, aren't you, Berna? And I think you might as well write a line to Richard, and try if he can't be shamed to sending a crumb or two from his wasteful table to prevent his own uncle's daughter dying of starvation."

"I will write to-morrow," said Berna, deferring the evil day; but when the morrow came there was no need for her to write. A letter arrived from Bath, enclosing a banker's draft for fifty pounds.

"We're made now—we'll do yet!" exclaimed the widow; and there was a terrible contrast between her jubilant words and cracked weak voice. "I knew the old woman couldn't hold out for ever. She's got to a time of life when, if she intends to make her soul, she ought to be making it. She'll be sending us lots of these—maybe one a month, I wouldn't wonder a single bit."

"We can have a doctor from Belfast to see you now," suggested Berna, feeling it better to defer the question of future benefactions.

"It mightn't be so ill done, though I grudge the money, and would rather put it past to buy a new dress for myself. I think if I only could get as far as Lindsay's, and see what they have fit to put on my back, I'd feel a heap the better for it. But there, where's the use of talking in a place where's there not a car standing for hire!"

The new doctor did not fall into the mistake the old had done. He said the patient ought to be kept up, and that she was quite at liberty to rise, and even walk in the sunshine, when she felt strong enough to do so.

"Well!" he exclaimed, echoing Mrs. Boyle's question, "of

course you will soon be as well as ever you were ;” and then, when he was going away, he said to Berna, “ Better keep your mother cheerful. Nothing accelerates the progress of disease so much as despondency. With care, the poor lady may still last some months.”

“ Do you mean that she is dangerously ill ?” asked Berna. “ Cannot you cure her ?”

“ The College of Physicians could not do that,” he answered gravely ; “ it’s a mere question of time.”

Yes, it had come to be a mere question of time, and not a long time either. Though patterns were sent for and brought out to Clear Stream, that new dress was never bought. Mrs. Boyle thought she would let the purchase “ stand over ” till able to go into Belfast herself, and turn everything upside down in her search for a bargain. Before a month had passed she began to wander a little at times, and talk of the old days and her father, as though both were still present. In that delirium, caused by utter physical exhaustion, there was nothing said Berna had not heard hundreds of times before, when the sufferer was strong and well ; but the story sounded differently when heard in the watches of the night ; when the feeble voice smote upon the ear with a weird sense of unreality, and mirth sounded strange, and weak laughter horrible, in view of the grim presence that pervaded a room in which Death could almost be seen, waiting patiently for his victim.

She recalled all the old scenes—tossing restlessly, she would murmur the name of some one who had been lying for years under the churchyard sod. She had many fretful complaints to make about the Boyles’ “ wicked hatred against a harmless young wife ;” but of later events her memory happily seemed to hold no account.

In her lucid moments—if, indeed, lucid is a word which could ever properly be applied to that unstable, wandering mind—she conceived the wildest infatuations to see all sorts and conditions of persons.

She would have liked the very beggars brought in, that she

might talk to them, and occasionally grew quite excited when her fancy was crossed.

But through all she never forgot to seek her daughter's hand ; never seemed content when Berna left the room. Restless while dying as she had been in the days of her health, she could not remain quiet for any lengthened period ; indeed, at the last, Ruth would not have known she was dead, had it not been for the sudden and utter stillness of the room. It was at the dead of night, and Berna hoped her mother slept. Ruth, however, stole noiselessly to the bedside, and, lightly moving the sheet, looked at a face on which the gray shadows were already settling. "It is all over, Miss Berna dear," she said, in a solemn whisper.

Yes, it was all over ; and the noblest and least selfish woman that ever breathed could not have been nursed with greater care, or mourned over with truer, tenderer grief.

"She'll trouble nobody any more," was Miss Muir's comment, in a tone which implied Mrs. Boyle had been a long-suffering saint, throughout her life misunderstood and persecuted by the inhabitants of a wicked world.

CHAPTER XLIX.

PROBABLY no man ever, in a religious and respectable way, felt more rejoiced than Mr. Vince, when he heard that "Almighty God, of His great mercy, had taken unto Himself the soul of" Millicent, relict of Ulick Boyle.

Of course he said it was a very sad thing; but he did not think so—quite the contrary. Had he spoken out his mind, people would have found he looked upon Mrs. Boyle's "translation" as a most happy event.

Had it been possible for him to unbend, he could have shouted and danced for joy. She had been a thorn in his flesh, a cramp to him, a running sore, a dread by day and a terror by night; and now he had done with her, at all events, till he too passed the boundary, when he earnestly hoped he should find himself in a world wide enough to avoid all chance of contact with his own first cousin.

"My dear," he said to Mrs. Vince, "I have bad news from Dundonald. That objectionable person, Mr. Muir, called at the office to-day, to let me know Mrs. Boyle died at a quarter to two this morning. I at once went out to Clear Stream Cottage to offer such assistance as might be required."

"That was most good and kind of you," exclaimed Mrs. Vince, even while she thought that this extraordinary act of generosity was merely a thank-offering to whatever might be considered as an equivalent to the Blessed Virgin in the mind of a good Presbyterian.

"At such a time I could not remember any small pique of my own, or any indiscretion on the part of Miss Boyle," answered Mr. Vince, with a modest consciousness of virtue.

"Thank you, Richard, thank you heartily."

"While Haffey was calling a car, I wrote a couple of letters, communicating the distressing intelligence to the Dowager and Sir Herbert Boyle. I thought—"

"They would be as glad to hear the news as yourself," was Mrs. Vince's mental finish to the sentence, but she only said, "Of course they ought to know, and as soon as possible, too."

"If it had not been for that unfortunate business about young Muir, Miss Boyle might have—"

"Fiddlededee!" interrupted Mrs. Vince. "The Dowager will see to her now poor Mrs. Boyle is out of the way."

"You think so?"

"Don't think—feel sure. Richard, we must have the girl here at once."

Mr. Vince cleared his throat twice.

"Do you know, Marcella," he said, "I think we ought to proceed cautiously. *Impulse* is very well, but *prudence* is better. I do not wish to say one word which might cause you to imagine I found fault with your kindness to my relative; for in estimating it, I never can forget it was on one connected with *me* you showered benefits. Still, we may do well to remember that it involved us in much unpleasantness with the poor creature who is gone, and that we have children of our own growing up, for whom Miss Boyle would prove an undesirable companion."

"We must make up our minds, though, now as to what we mean to do about her," answered Mrs. Vince. "While we are hesitating, the Boyles will have invited the girl; then it will be too late for us to take the initiative."

"But only consider, my dear, the talk there has been about her."

"Put an end to it by asking her here. Every one will understand she never could have been invited to Craigvallen unless *you* were quite satisfied that she was not to blame."

"There is much in what you say," agreed Mr. Vince; and then he paused, as if, struck afresh by his own greatness, he was anxious to survey it.

"All this time I have forgotten to ask how Berna herself is."

"The old servant says but poorly. She was lying down, being completely exhausted. I propose to go to the cottage again early to-morrow. Meantime, I have left all necessary instructions. The only difficulty seems to be that Mrs. Boyle expressed some sort of wish to be buried at Ballynure, which of course is out of the question. Why should she wish to have all that was mortal laid at Ballynure?"

"Why, indeed," echoed Mrs. Vince, "having once left that earthly paradise?"

"Such a proceeding would be most inconvenient and—undesirable," remarked Mr. Vince.

"Of course it would. All I hope is that she has not extracted any promise from Berna about the matter."

"That is exactly what I fear she has done; and though such a promise must, under the circumstances, have been of necessity conditional, still it is not improbable Miss Boyle may attach undue importance to it."

"Then I ought to go to Clear Stream with you to talk to the poor girl. What *can* it matter where we are buried?"

In his heart Mr. Vince considered it mattered a great deal to him; but he did not express this sentiment, for he honestly considered Mrs. Boyle ought to have had no preference on the subject, and that if her mind were so ill-regulated as to entertain one, no human being was bound to regard it.

Berna, however, held a different idea. She had promised that her mother should be buried at Ballynure, and she meant to keep her word to the letter. She was obliged to Mr. Vince, and grateful to his wife; but she stuck to her text. No argument could induce her to waver. It was the last wish of her dead that she could ever gratify; and though Mr. Vince evinced anger and Mrs. Vince regret, she said she was sorry to go against their advice and wishes, but the funeral must take place at Ballynure.

"Ruth and I can see to it all, Mr. Vince," she faltered; "we must not trouble you."

"Of course it is necessary I should attend to the matter," answered Mr. Vince, rising in stern anger. He was not accustomed to be crossed; and from the first, as he thought, the dead woman and her daughter had disputed his will.

"Do not ask that girl to my house," he said to his wife. "The Boyles may do as they like; but I will sever the connection now. She is as self-willed as her mother was foolish. Nothing but evil and annoyance can come of continuing the acquaintance."

"I did ask her," answered Mrs. Vince; "and she refused to come."

"All the better," retorted Mr. Vince.

If there be any truth in the old adage, Mrs. Boyle's corpse ought to have been happy exceedingly. On the day she was buried, a wild storm of wind and rain swept over the lonely graveyard where she elected to lie "among her own." From far and near the Vince clan gathered to do honour to one who had been, as a toothless old gentleman declared, the "flower of the flock." Mr. Vince, muffled up to his ears, scanned "his family" from beneath the shade of a huge umbrella, and decided he had never previously conceived there were so many Vincés on earth.

But they all treated him with great deference, and the clergyman, seemingly possessed by an idea that the rich man was broken-hearted by reason of his loss, shook hands in quite a touching way after the service, and said, "In the midst of life we are in death," and "We are here to-day and gone to-morrow," and "Comparatively quite a young woman, I understand;" while the countryside, assembled in force, collectively touched its hat, and felt greatly elated because Richard Charles recognised and stopped to speak with a few persons in the crowd.

"The poor mistress had as grand a funeral as heart need desire to see," sobbed Ruth, as she sat before a "neighbour

woman's" fire, while her soaked garments were being dried; and popular opinion fully confirmed this statement. Mr. Vince had "done the business" thoroughly. He had disliked the idea of returning to the scenes of his youth—to the place where he and his had been so poor; but money judiciously spent could have made an even worse experience pleasant.

There was no one who could have accused him of meanness in connection with his cousin's funeral. Everything was "befitting."

"If she had been a countess he could have done no more," was the unanimous verdict. Every one was satisfied—even the Vinces, who had a carouse at the village public, paid for by Richard Charles. That good man and true, on the plea of being obliged to return at once to Belfast, declined to take so much as a crust with his relatives; but perhaps on this account they enjoyed themselves all the more.

"The daughter will go to her father's relations," decided the Vince connection. "She'll be best out of Ireland after that trouble with young Muir."

"Perhaps she may refuse their offer," ventured one sceptic.

"Trust her!" was the answer; "she'll jump at the chance."

But Berna did not jump at the chance when it came in her way.

"I should much prefer being independent," she said to Mrs. Vince, who drove out to Clear Stream in order to discuss the Dowager's letter with her. "You know, none of papa's family ever liked mamma, and supposing I turned to them now, it would seem as if—as if—"

"As if what?" asked Mrs. Vince a little sharply.

"As if I was not so sorry as I am, because mamma is dead; they might even think I felt *glad* she was gone."

"Good Heavens, who would not be!" thought Mrs. Vince, but she only said aloud,

"My dear child, be reasonable; do try to look at things from a rational point of view. Knowing what you gave up for

your poor mother, how could the Dowager possibly misjudge you now? Besides, you see what she says, 'Death pays all scores.'"

"I do not imagine the Dowager quite thinks that; I do not know exactly how she could," answered Berna, remembering the years of estrangement between her father and his family, recalling the period during which her mother had worn and tried the Boyles, and dragged their pride and dignity through the dust of earth's commonest roads.

"I believe the Dowager to be perfectly honest in what she writes," returned Mrs. Vince; "and, at all events, you have no right to peril your whole future for the sake of any sentiment, no matter how natural, loyal, or lovable that sentiment may be. It is your life you have to make or mar now, not your mother's. Cherish her memory as much as you like, but you can do that quite as well living among good people, and moving in a good rank in life, as moping here in sackcloth and ashes, or earning your bread, a thing which your father's daughter ought not to do. You owe a duty to both your parents. You have amply discharged that due to your mother. Now consider your father a little. If he were alive, what would he tell you to do as regards going to Cheltenham?"

Berna did not answer. She walked to the window and looked out. She threw up the sash, and plucking a rose, began studying it intently.

"Well, what are you puzzling about?" asked Mrs. Vince.

"I do not know that even—" began the girl slowly.

"That even what?" asked Marcella.

"That even if my father were here, his advice could help me much. In the first place, had he not died I could never have been situated as I am. In the second, I doubt very much whether advice is really so useful as people imagine."

"I don't know that it is," agreed Mrs. Vince, remembering how entirely she had managed that business of Richard Charles for herself, both before marriage and after. "But we need scarcely enter upon an abstract argument about the matter. Supposing you are right, what then?"

"I have only been thinking that putting my mother out of the question, perhaps—perhaps I ought not to go to Cheltenham at all—now, or ever—except for an occasional visit. It is not as though I had remained with the Dowager from the first. That would have altered matters. I have lived half a lifetime—at least so it seems to me—since she bade me choose between my mother and herself, and I am old enough now to know what she did once she may do twice."

"You mean—"

"I mean that some day we might again differ in opinion, and after leading a life of luxury I should find it harder to face the world than would be the case at present."

"There is some sense in what you say, though I do not think there is very much," answered Mrs. Vince. "At all events, I do not suppose it can be necessary for you to decide on any special course immediately, and you have money enough for all present requirements."

"Yes, quite enough," Berna answered; but she did not tell Mrs. Vince she had paid the debt to Ruth, and all the other debts caused by her mother's long illness, and that the amount remaining in her purse would scarcely suffice to provide herself and Ruth with bare necessities for three months.

She could have been frank enough with Mrs. Vince alone, but behind that lady's kindly face she always saw looming darkly the stern hard presence of Richard Charles.

"I will try not to trouble any of them further," she thought with some bitterness; which was ungrateful, for Mrs. Vince really loved and had her interest at heart.

"Give Berna a little time," she wrote to the Dowager. "Her wound is still very green and tender; besides which I really do think she cared greatly for young Muir, and would have married him had his relations been even ordinarily presentable."

So the Dowager waited; but Ulick Boyle's daughter made no sign. Alone with Ruth in the cottage at Clear Stream, Berna considered what she was to do, with an aching heart.

Pretty Carline Cragland, who chanced to be stopping at Ardilaw, came to say, "Robert had bid her ask Miss Boyle whether she wouldn't stop with them for a while."

"It's a pleasant place we've got near Dumfries," she went on; "and you'd be quiet, and could just do as you liked. I did not care for it at first; but now I'm well content. The air is good, and I think the change would set up your health."

The offer was kindly meant and kindly put; but Berna shook her head. "I must think about earning my living," she answered.

"And O," cried Carline, shyly raising her lovely eyes to Berna's face, "why couldn't you have taken poor Gorman? Sure, he'd never have let you do a hand's turn; he'd have worked his fingers to the bone for you; the very ground you walked on was dear to him for your sake. Man never cared for woman more than he cared for you. A better brother could not have been, I am sure; when I was broken-hearted almost, and fighting hard with my father not to take my present husband, Gorman was more like a mother to me than aught else. I am happy enough now—happier, maybe, than I had any right to expect to be; but I was sick and sorry, shamed and tired of life, and longing to creep away and lie down in some corner and die; and I'll never forget it to him, never, the way he'd come after me, and talk about the trouble, till half its weight seemed gone."

Berna had never heard the story of Ensign Ludham's misdoings; so Carline told it to her then. With many a pause and many a gap and many a hesitation, that love-dream, the end of which had so nearly been disgrace, was related to ears that burned as they listened.

It seemed an awful story to Berna; she felt as if she could have risen and done battle with the man who had so nearly dragged down to ruin a trustful, innocent, foolish girl. And then more and more she thanked God she had never let her heart plead for Gorman so successfully as to become a member of the Muir family.

"I know Gorman has brought a heap of trouble on you," went on Carline, unconsciously planting another dagger in Berna's breast at the very moment she was engaged in devout thanksgiving. "He put it in people's power to talk, but he never meant to vex you. It was my father set him on. Robert always said that; and Sally heard a word or two let drop when they fell out, the time Gorman left Ardilaw, that confirmed his notion. My father's a just man and a good, though he is hard; but he can't stand being crossed, particularly by a woman. For my own part, I think most of us are as good as the men, to say the least of it."

Good gracious! and she might have married into such a family as this if she had not been as wise as a serpent! Berna shuddered. "Better be happy than proud," her old nurse had once told her. "No—a thousand times no!" decided the girl; besides, she could not have been happy amid such surroundings.

"It will be no great hardship to earn my own living; but I could not have borne that," she thought, as she stood at the cottage-door, watching Mrs. Cragland tripping over the bridge Gorman's feet had so often trodden. And next day she said something about "earning her living" to Mrs. Gray, who had called to invite the girl for a week or two over to Bangor.

"Well, if you are still set to go out, and don't want any salary, I wouldn't say but we could get on together," suggested Mrs. Gray. "You might make yourself very useful about the house."

Berna felt a very demon of pride stirring in her heart, but she did not actually say "no." She knew the certainty of daily bread was not to be despised—besides, this might prove an opening to something better. "Thank you," she said, "I will think of it."

"I'm in no hurry," returned Mrs. Gray; "take your own time."

So Berna stopped on at the cottage, "swithering," to quote her nurse, whether to go to Bangor or not. It was at this time

she received an offer which fairly astonished her. It came from Miss Garnsey.

"I want a companion of my own age, sadly," explained that young lady. "I think we might get on together. Will you try whether we can or not? Papa says he would like you to come"—which assertion was indeed quite true, Mr. Garnsey having added it would be a comfort to see a pretty face about the house for once. "Let me drive you over to Beechfield, and you shall see whether you like the old place."

Berna did not wait five minutes—she did not wait one—before closing with this offer. She asked no time to consider; she took no advice.

"I shall be glad to go to you," she said simply.

"That is right; when may I come back for you? To-morrow?"

"Yes—if you like," hesitated Berna.

"O, *I* shall like: to-morrow, then!" and Miss Garnsey went off laughing.

"I hope it may be for your good, my lamb," said Ruth; but she said it doubtfully.

"Gone to Beechfield, is she?" remarked Mr. Muir, when Bell told him the news. "Faith, maybe she'd reasons best known to herself for giving my son the go-by."

"Ay," capped Miss Muir, "Lyle Garnsey would be a husband worth having, with Beechfield at his back. *But she hasn't got him yet.*"

"Gone to Beechfield," thought Mrs. Vince, as she folded up Berna's letter; "I wonder how she will like *that*? It is a mistake, but I must try to make the best of the matter to the old lady."

CHAPTER L.

FOR some months Berna liked life at Beechfield very much indeed. She was not a "companion" in any sense save that of perfect equality and friendship. Had she been her sister, Miss Garnsey could not have shown greater consideration and kindness. She was treated like one of the family, with such courtesy superadded, as might have been extended to some honoured guest.

"I want you to feel Beechfield your home," said Miss Garnsey. "I wish to keep you here."

Of Mr. Garnsey they saw, till close on Christmas, very little indeed. Most of the time he was in Dublin; and the two girls led a quiet peaceful life, undisturbed by visitors, going into society not at all. By slow degrees Berna's mind recovered its tone. She grew stronger mentally and physically; but the better her health became, the more a certain pensive melancholy deepened. Little by little she again took up the burden of existence, helped to do so perhaps by Miss Garnsey, who for some reason began to evince an interest in other matters besides dogs and horses. The grand piano, so long disused, was put in order. Seated by the fire, Miss Garnsey got through a vast amount of needlework for the poor. She liked Berna to read to her while thus engaged—poetry and romance. Once she despised song, verse, and fiction; but she had "found her heart," and learnt in suffering that lore which might once have won for her love.

So far, they had exchanged no confidences. There was a story about which neither spoke. The weeks passed by, and Gorman Muir's name was never mentioned, till one stormy day in January, when Miss Garnsey broke a long and thoughtful silence by saying, "So you did care for him, after all!"

Berna was so surprised she could not answer.

"I have been wondering ever since you came here whether you did or not," went on Miss Garnsey, laying down her work, and looking with serious wistful eyes at the girl Gorman had loved. "What made you treat him so hardly? Had a man cared for me as much as he cared for you, I must have ended by giving him my whole heart, even though I hated him at the first."

Berna's head drooped a little, but she spoke no word.

"Did you part in anger?" asked Miss Garnsey.

"No."

"Why did you send him away?"

"I think you ought not to ask me."

"I think I ought. Do you know, there was a time when I should have been glad to see you dead rather than his wife; but that is all gone and past. It was a hard thing for me to ask you here. I had to fight a battle with myself before I could fulfil the promise I made him. Did you suppose I really wanted a companion, and that companion a woman—I, who had lived all my life alone or amongst men?"

"I am very sorry," said Berna. It was a feeble expression, but it was the first that rose to her lips.

"You need not be sorry, for you have done me good. I do not dislike you now, I like you; but I want to know—O, I do so want to know—how you could find it in your heart to let him go, loving him all the while, for you did love him?"

"Yes, I loved him."

"Then why did you not keep him?"

"I cannot tell you," answered Berna.

"You will not, you mean. If you had seen him as I saw him the night he left, I think you would have said 'Stay.' We stood beside that window, and he told me *all*. It was bitter suffering for me to hear him speak as he did about you—I, who would have given anything on earth for one word of love! Had he asked me to go with him, I would have followed him through the world; I would have been thankful for even a

crumb of affection ! Shall I ever forget that parting—ever—ever—ever ? My heart broke when he said good-bye !”

Poor Berna ! If she never understood before, she knew now her own heart was broken too.

“And you would not stretch out a finger to keep him ! You sent him away, a wanderer on the face of the earth ! You deserve to be miserable, and I rejoice to know you are !”

“I am miserable !” The words were wrung from the very depths of her soul.

“Yet if he came back again now this minute, what would you say to him ?”

“I do not know.”

“I do. You would say, ‘I will not marry you.’ And then, when he went a second time, you would like him to return and pray to you once more. His father stood between the wind and your nobility, forsooth ! Had it been my case, I would have taken him, father or no father, sister or no sisters ! Where could you find a man like him—strong, tender, generous, impulsive, yet staunch ? O, when I think of the way he spoke about you—as of one scarcely lower than the angels—I wonder how you could treat him as you did !”

“Why did he—”

“Why did he talk to me about you—is that it ?” asked Miss Garnsey, as Berna paused. “Because he was anxious ; he knew you were lonely ; he feared you might want a friend. He asked me to be your friend, if you ever stood in need of one ; and I, poor fool, could refuse him nothing. It was hard to do what I did ; but, God knows, if it had been fifty times harder, I would have done it for his sake—I would, I would.”

Berna put out her hand, but Miss Garnsey would have none of it.

“Don’t do that,” she said. “Since you came here I have asked myself over and over again what charm there is about you which could so enslave a man. I do not know ; but, then, I am a woman. Do not mind what I say. I would not say it

if I could help it ; but when I think of how he cared for you, I seem to—”

She broke off in the middle of her sentence, and began pacing up and down the room.

“Do you wonder why I talk in this way to you now? It is because I want you to do one thing for him. I want you to take your grandmother’s offer, and go to her. He hoped she would ask you ; he hoped you would agree ; he loved you better than himself ; he understood you thoroughly.”

“Do you wish me, then, to leave here?”

“No, not *wish* ; but you cannot stop much longer. Are you so blind as not to see why?”

“What can you mean?”

“I mean—no ; stay, if you like, and find out for yourself ; only, should anything disagreeable occur, do not blame me. As I gather, if you reject your grandmother’s latest advance, it will never be renewed. I may tell you she has written also to me, and that I am sure you ought to consider her wishes. Granted that she did not like your mother—there was no sin in that. You told me she sent money to her ; what more could she do? You cannot force people to love each other by Act of Parliament. What she says is perfectly true : if you must be a companion, be a companion to her. She is old ; she is lonely ; she wants some one to talk to. She thinks it unfitting you should occupy a subordinate position in a stranger’s house ; so do I. No one, except yourself, can imagine why you have so long declined to go to her. You ought to go.”

“Her last letter to me was certainly most kind,” said Berna, with thoughtful slowness, mentally recalling each word it contained.

“Perhaps you may have had some absurd idea that you ought not to leave me,” scoffed Miss Garnsey ; “that I could not do without you ; that you were bound in gratitude to remain and keep me company in this delightful house. If you had any idea of the sort, dismiss it. I managed to exist before you came ; I daresay I shall contrive to live after you go.

You know now why I asked you here. It was not easy for me to ask you ; but your society has been pleasant. Remember that ! O, here comes papa ! Really we ought to feel honoured ; I do not know when he spent so much time in the drawing-room as he has done during the last fortnight—not within my memory, at all events."

"What is not within your memory, Lydia?" asked Mr. Garnsey, gently closing the door behind him.

"The delight of seeing you beside the domestic hearth," answered his daughter. "You seem lately to have developed quite an affection for this spacious apartment."

"Miss Boyle has altered its character," he said gallantly. "I do not know how I can ever thank her sufficiently for making you feminine. Like the rose, you lacked one grace, my dear. Like the angel, Miss Boyle has conferred it."

"What a delightful compliment to us both ! Unaccustomed as I am to flattery from the paternal lips, I feel incompetent properly to express my thanks. You must make some pretty speeches for me in my absence," she added, turning to Berna. "Perhaps, if you are very good, you might persuade papa to explain to you exactly what he means by the word feminine—possibly needlework and poetry, singing and use of the globes."

"You are a very saucy girl," said Mr. Garnsey, following his daughter with his eyes, as she moved to the door. "I wish, Miss Boyle, you could make Lydia walk across a room as well as you do."

"These personal remarks hurt my feelings, papa," remonstrated Miss Garnsey. "I shall go at once, as I do not know what you may say about me next. Do not make our young friend *too* vain, though. Admirable as she is, it might be possible to spoil her ;" and Miss Garnsey was not seen again till she appeared at luncheon.

"Where is Miss Boyle, Anna?" she asked the maid who was waiting.

"If you please, ma'am, Miss Boyle has a headache, and hopes you will excuse her."

Miss Garnsey said nothing while she helped her father to a cutlet. When they were alone, however, she looked across the table and smiled.

"I am afraid," she remarked, "you have been almost too complimentary to Miss Boyle; like myself, she is not accustomed to flattery."

Mr. Garnsey bit his lip, but made no rejoinder. He poured out a second glass of wine, and drank it off. Miss Garnsey finished her piece of pudding, and thought about many things.

"What are you doing?" she asked, entering Berna's bed-chamber, where she found that young lady on her knees before a trunk.

"Packing," was the explicit reply.

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"I must leave here at once."

Miss Garnsey burst out laughing. "So you have found out for yourself! I knew it was coming. You would not take good advice, you see."

For answer Berna covered her face with her hands, and broke into passionate weeping.

"Don't cry like that—it will do no good; don't, child!" and Miss Garnsey sat down on the carpet beside her, looking very much inclined to cry too.

"I could not have believed any man would so insult a girl," sobbed Berna.

There came a set stern expression about Miss Garnsey's mouth.

"You did not know my worthy father," she said.

Berna's tears flowed without restraint. She rocked herself to and fro in an abandonment of misery.

"It was very bad, then?" suggested Miss Garnsey at last.

"Very—bad—dreadful!"

"I am horribly sorry. Did he say anything about Gorman Muir?"

"Yes. O, what am I to do?—what *am* I to do?" cried the girl hysterically.

"Dry your eyes and bathe your face, and then we will talk things out together. Tears won't mend affairs. Do as I tell you, while I think matters over."

No one who had only seen Miss Garnsey tramping about the country with her dogs could have imagined the soft affection, the womanly tenderness, with which she took Berna, who could not restrain or control a passion of grief that amounted to a paroxysm, in her arms, and drew the weary head down on her shoulder.

"My poor child—my poor, poor child! Ah, there was one who would have shielded you from all this, if you had let him. Where is he now, I wonder?"

"You will not prevent my going?" moaned Berna.

"No; but we must think where you are to go. Wait—wait. Yes, that is the best plan. Mrs. Vince will help you. She will tell you what to do. Of course I know Mr. Vince was vexed at your coming here; but Mr. Vince is not Mrs. Vince. I will go with you to Craigvallen; and when I have seen you safe there, I can come back by myself."

"No; I must not take you out on such a day. Besides, I shall be better alone."

Miss Garnsey hesitated.

"You will promise to be guided by Mrs. Vince's advice?" she said at last.

"Yes—implicitly."

"And you will accept your grandmother's offer?"

"I suppose I must."

"Do not speak so mournfully. The prospect is not very dreary."

"O, if you knew what your father said!"

"I do not want to know what he said, and you had better forget all about it as soon as possible. If his remarks drive you to Cheltenham, they will have effected a splendid result. I shall see you safe to the train, at any rate. Do not wait to pack

your clothes ; I will attend to that afterwards. Have you money ? Here is my purse. You can repay me any time or no time. When Gorman Muir comes back, what shall I tell him ?”

“He will never come back,” answered Berna. “He told me he never should.”

“Never is a long time. A man always comes back, except from the grave,” returned Miss Garnsey sententiously. “I wonder what Mrs. Vince’s advice will be ?”

Mrs. Vince’s advice assumed the form of a statement.

When Berna had said all she had to say, the wife of Richard Charles rang the bell.

“Tell John,” she said, “to have the carriage at the door in time to catch the Liverpool boat.”

CHAPTER LI.

THE Crimean War was over. Englishmen had done what England expects her men to do—their duty. The pride of Russia was temporarily snuffed out. On the 30th September 1855, or on the Sunday following, a thanksgiving had been offered up in all churches and chapels in England and Wales, and in the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed, couched in that propitiatory language which modern divines seem to think must find favour in the eyes of The Almighty.

But spite of all our protestations we were *not* humble, and we had *not* been so *very* good. On the contrary, we, as a nation, were uplifted greatly. We felt we stood above all other nations; once again we were on our own dunghill, and crowed greatly. The men who had died, the men who had suffered, we reckoned as little or nothing. To compass peace, to send up the Funds, we felt quite content to know women were widows, and children orphans. Had we shown a bold front at first, there need not have been so many widows and orphans. History repeats itself. What was being done in the Crimea in 1854-5 is being enacted now in Egypt. If we manage to get clear out of Egypt, we shall wipe our saintly mouths, and think we have inaugurated a reign of peace for ever.

The Indian Mutiny followed that small trouble in the Crimea. We have had several tiny wars since then. Perhaps England might be wise to abandon her intent study of the Three per Cents, and look back over the road she has travelled.

Before me, while I write, lies a copy of that wonderful prayer of thanksgiving—especially “for the Capture of the Town of Sebastopol.”

Reading, I can but consider what a marvellously self-suffi-

cient and foolish race we are. Experience seems to teach us nothing. At the close of each war we sit down to inaugurate a Millennium evolved out of our own internal consciousness. Even the *Times*—while admitting the fact that we had added in one year 16,000,000*l.* to our National Debt and exposed our troops to two terrible repulses—on the last day of 1855 shook hands all round with its readers, and congratulated them on not being in the position of our vanquished foe, whose “trade is almost annihilated,” and who “has been driven to suspend specie payments !”

During the time that, according to the same authority, “we were keeping keen wintry watch on the Crimea, and executing the stern decree of Providence on the great stronghold of a mighty Empire,” life in London was going on in very much the same way, as though “we” had not been fighting at all. People danced and gave dinner-parties, went to balls and spent money, married and were given in marriage, died and left personalities which the *Illustrated London News* reported just in the same way as it did last week, and as it will do next.

A few thousand men were killed ; there was mourning in many homes ; but the great mass of Englishmen went forth to their labour and their pleasure as regularly and calmly as they might have done had we been at peace with Russia.

Two ladies, at all events, who resided in a small house in Mayfair, pursued the even tenor of existence with a regularity which bordered on monotony. One was old, the other young ; one was Mrs., the other Berna, Boyle. They had been living together for nearly twenty-four months, a time long enough to prove to the Dowager that most human plans are vanity. She had wished her young relative to marry well, and Berna would not marry at all. Suitors had come, and suitors had gone, but the girl smiled on none of them. It never became necessary to tell any man that old story the Dowager felt ought to be confided only to a future husband. Berna had slipped out of her teens, and was close on three-and-twenty, and yet she seemed as far off marrying as ever. Living in an atmosphere

of ease and luxury, her beauty had developed till few girls could be found to compare with her, even in London, that great conservatory of English beauty. Figure, face, voice, manners, were alike charming. Looking at her, the Dowager would shake her head sadly.

"A spoiled life," she thought, "if she never can bring herself to care for any one."

About the beginning of the year 1856, when peace with Russia was celebrated with such rejoicing, Mrs. Boyle's spirits rose in what seemed to Berna an unaccountable manner.

Nothing, so far as she knew, had occurred to cause this change. Her own heart felt as sad as ever. Go where she would, do what she chose, one face, she believed she should never see again, looked at her across the years; one voice sounded in her ears; words tender and passionate haunted her. When other men came wooing she contrasted their colder utterances with sentences which were full of fire. She had never been kind to him, and now he was gone she knew what a waste the world seemed. Away from contact with the members of his family, she half forgot how objectionable they were; she knew her association with them need only have been of the slightest. He would have gone where she wished, done as she liked; her people should have been his people, and her God his. She might have taken his hand, and led him by the path of love up the heights of heaven; she had repelled affection which was at least disinterested; she had been hard and cold. Ah, how often in the night-watches she heard again his cry, "My cruel, cruel love!" She had ruined his life; she had driven him from his country. What was he doing? What had he done since they parted? Married, perhaps. And then her lonely heart sobbed in sorrow and bitterness over the supreme misery of its empty desolation.

She knew now what she had lost, what she had spurned. She had thought pride would support her, but in the time of trial it proved but a broken reed.

They were sitting alone after dinner, silent in the quiet

firelight. Berna thought her grandmother was asleep, till this sentence broke the stillness :

"Berna, I want to speak to you seriously."

"I will give serious attention," answered the girl, wondering who the fresh suitor might be, but not doubting that a fresh suitor had arisen; for the world supposed she would be an heiress, and where the prey is, there the birds of the air gather together.

"During the time you have lived with me I have kept strictly to the spirit of the two promises I voluntarily made to you: one, that I would not mention your mother with any feeling of ill-will; the other, that you should not be urged into any uncongenial marriage."

"What you say is more than true, and I have often longed to thank you for your forbearance."

"I have been disappointed," went on the Dowager; "it would be idle for me to deny that. I hoped you would have married long ere this. Though still strong and active, I am getting old, my dear, very old; and what I desire most in this world is to see you settled before I receive that summons none of us can refuse to obey."

"How could I live without you?" murmured the girl.

"Indeed, I do not know. Without a home of your own, without home-ties, I fear you would be a most miserable woman. Gaiety appears to have no charm for you; the troubles of your girlhood seem to have clouded your life. Your tone of thought is grave, not to say sad; you are earnest; you want work of some kind. You need an interest in existence. If I were dead, where and with whom could you live? Herbert's wife is all very well, but she is wrapped up in her children; and there is no niche in that household you would fill. I want you to marry, my child. When you have a husband who will take care of you, I shall feel happy—but not till then."

"I wish I could do what you desire, but it is beyond my power."

"Men have proposed for you most girls would have been proud to accept."

"I know that."

"Then why will you not marry?"

"Because I can care for none of them."

"Is that because you care for some one else? Berna dear, be frank with me. There must be a reason for your indifference. When youth, wealth, rank, and talent come courting, girls are not usually so cold as you."

There was a dead silence, during which Berna heard nothing, save the moan of her desolate soul.

"If what I am going to say be true, do not deny it. Make no answer, and I shall know. You loved that young man Muir; you love him still?"

"It is not my fault," said Berna deprecatingly.

"I have not accused you of any fault."

"It is not of my own free will I ever think of him," declared Berna, with burning cheeks and trembling voice. "If I could but forget—if I only *could* forget, you should not have any cause to find fault with me."

"I am not finding fault with you."

"I do not know what you must think of such folly. I feel ashamed of myself. To-night, when I am alone, I shall recall what I have said just now, and lament my own weakness more than you can do."

"Are you certain it is weakness?"

"Yes, because from the first I knew he could never be anything to me. And yet, if you had seen him, you would understand how hard it was to feel I must say 'no, no,' to the end."

"I have seen him, and I can understand."

"You have seen him—lately?" and Berna's heart gave a leap, and then seemed to stand still.

"No, not for a long time—I saw him immediately before he enlisted."

"ENLISTED! Did you say enlisted?"

"Yes, that was what I did say."

"Why did you never tell me that before?"

"Why should I? What better or happier would you have been for knowing he was facing death?"

"My God!" said Berna faintly, "I never dreamed of this!"

"He came to me and left some money in my hands for you. I wish he were here to reclaim it. Don't look so wretched, child. He is not dead; he has been badly wounded, but—"

"Wounded!"

"Where is your pride now?—if ever you had any. Remember, you are giving your pity to a common soldier."

"I have no pride left," moaned the girl. "O my poor Gorman—my handsome, gallant, daring lover—to think of your serving in the ranks!"

"It was the best thing he could do," retorted the Dowager; "and he did it for your sake. He brought all he had in the world to me—for you; and I took it, because—well, I do not know why I took it."

"You have heard from him since he went away?"

"Never—never once. He enlisted in a feigned name. He has fought and suffered and proved his courage in utter silence. Through the years he has made no sign; it is not likely he will make a sign now. He put the barrier between you he knew he could not leap. Better forget him, Berna."

"I can never do that."

"But, my child, you could not marry a man who has only about a shilling a day; who has mixed with the commonest and roughest in the country; who must have sunk all pretensions to being a gentleman; who is less your equal now than he ever was; who, mad though he may have been in the past, would not be mad enough again to ask you to be his wife."

"No; he will never ask me again now."

"Then you ought seriously to think of marrying some one

else. I have told you that unless you marry I shall only leave you one hundred a year."

"One hundred a year will be more than enough for me."

"Very well ; if you are satisfied it does not signify, I suppose, that I am disappointed. Do not try to coax me, child. Let us forget this conversation. I hoped—but never mind what I hoped. It is best that we have come to an understanding. Somehow it seems to me you have made a terrible mess of your life."

"And what have I made of his?"

"Precisely what you would make again if you had the chance ; besides, I daresay he has been very happy. Our troops have had delightful weather and a pleasant picnic in the Crimea. Why should you fret ? One had but to look at Gorman Muir to know a soldier's life was the very life for him."

"Under what name did he enlist?"

"Ah, that is my secret."

"You have some means of hearing about him, dear, dear granny?"

"Yes, occasionally."

"If you should hear, will you—"

"I cannot say ; I shall make no promise ; we had better never recur to the subject again. It is of no use, Berna, clinging about me and kissing me. There—there ! when I know whether he gets over his wounds, perhaps I may tell you. Dear me ! if you were so fond of him, why did you not marry him, and avoid all that dreadful scandal, which I shiver to think of ? Well, what is it now, Burton ? A gentleman by appointment to see me ; O, I remember—show him into the drawing-room."

Before the Dowager returned, Berna had leisure to go over the whole Crimean campaign, and picture Gorman as a prominent figure in every charge which meant success to England.

Through a mist of tears she saw him fighting—wounded,

suffering. Her heart was too full for thought, as in a vision she saw scene after scene passing before her eyes.

"And I never knew," was the refrain of her tired heart—"I never knew!"

"All in the dark, Berna?" said Mrs. Boyle, at last, laying a hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I—I had forgotten," she answered, startled; "I have been dreaming, I fancy."

"Well, wake up now; there is a trooper in the drawing-room, who has brought me news of Gorman Muir. You may go and talk to him if you like. It seems the poor fellow has suffered frightfully."

Berna rose, but then paused irresolute.

"Are you not anxious to hear what this person has to say? He knows your friend very well indeed. His name is—John Jones."

Like one half blind, Berna moved slowly to the door, and groped her way to the drawing-room.

Against the chimneypiece, on which burned one wax candle, leaned a man, whose face was turned from her. Trembling she advanced towards him. As the rustling of her dress caught his ear he looked up and turned!

He was pale and worn and wan, a mere shadow of his former self, but with a glad cry she recognised him.

"Gorman, Gorman!" she panted. Ah, what had he not passed through since he asked her so to call him!

"My darling!" and he took her to his heart.

* * * * *

"Well, this is very pretty!" exclaimed the Dowager, entering shortly after, and surveying the picture of her great-granddaughter standing with face hidden on her lover's breast. "Really, Mr. Jones, I think you are too bad! Don't run away, you silly puss. After such conduct I shall insist on your marrying this young man, if he is still willing to take you."

"May I marry her this minute?" asked Gorman, his bronzed face radiant with happiness.

“ I think you had better make up your mind to wait till to-morrow,” laughed the Dowager. “ Come, Miss Berna, you may give me a kiss. I am a very happy old lady, my dear, and it is you have made me so.”

CONCLUSION.

"WHAT I want to know," said Sir Herbert Boyle, "is this—what are they going to live on?"

"They are going to live," answered the Dowager, "upon the income Mr. Trevasson decides to allow Mr. Muir, and the yearly amount I shall settle on Berna."

"I was not aware Mr. Trevasson had forgiven his nephew."

"Long ago he found out he had nothing to forgive. When his excellent wife eloped with Colonel Denton, she left a letter behind boasting of the division she had caused, and glorying in her wickedness."

"Then we may presume Mr. Muir will eventually come into possession of Mount Michael?"

"I do not know. I believe he *must* eventually succeed to Clonmellin. Both Mr. Gorman's sons are dead, and by the deed of entail, failing male heirs, the property reverts to the eldest son of the eldest daughter."

"Upon my word, Berna has not done badly for herself."

"And what I propose to do is to leave half my fortune to her and half to you."

"Thank you," said Sir Herbert, who would have liked it all. "And what about the Muir family?"

"The happy couple will no doubt act as they think best in that matter, tempering, probably, intimacy with discretion."

"I do not exactly see why, if Berna meant to marry the man at last, she did not marry him at first."

"I should say she could not explain that little puzzle herself. However, we needn't trouble our heads trying to solve that enigma now."

"When is the marriage to take place?"

"When the milliners and others are graciously pleased to let us have the wedding bravery."

"Is not that Mr. Muir crossing the street?"

"Yes, with Major Ludham. He saved the Major's life, you know. I wonder how it is, they do not seem to get on well together!"

"Ludham is a confoundedly bad lot, though he did fight like twenty demons. Am I to give away the bride?"

"Of course. Miss Garnsey has expressed her willingness to be bridesmaid on a curious condition. 'I shall not come,' she writes to Berna, 'unless I am assured the best man is *young and good-looking*.'"

"And is he?"

"He is one of the handsomest men in the county Kilkenny."

"So that everything promises to go off well?"

"Very well. Mr. and Mrs. Vince and the little Vincés are all coming over for the ceremony. Mr. Trevasson hopes to be present, also Mr. and Mrs. Gorman."

"So that poor Mr. Muir is the only one left out in the cold?"

"Poor Mr. Muir was invited, but he had the rare good sense to decline for self and family."

"I never was at so merry a wedding," said Major Ludham to Miss Garnsey, over the breakfast. "It makes me quite long to be getting married myself. My only regret is that Muir would not let me have any finger in the pie. As he got so badly wounded in my behalf, I wanted to give him a wife, and he would not let me. I then asked to be best man, and he would not have me. Any one might think he owed me a grudge for having stood between me and death."

Miss Garnsey looked at the speaker very steadily while she said,

"I do not suppose he is *sorry* he saved your life; but should you really think it likely that he is *glad*?"

“He ought to be, considering the admirable person I am, and how much I should like to marry into the family, and have Mr. Muir for a papa-in-law. That pretty sister of his, Carline, married some stupid farmer, I think; but—happy thought!—there is Bell. Do you know Bell, Miss Garnsey?”

“Intimately.”

“Muir,” called out the Major, “I do so want to have another wedding. Do you think your sister Bell would have me?”

“You can ask her,” answered Gorman grimly.

“That would be worse than Balaclava!” whispered the Major to his companion.

THE END.

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